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ABSTRACT

By devolving authority to local schools, the 1988 Chicago School Reform Act sought to weaken central power in the school system and to promote greater site-based control. This report presents the voices of Chicago Illinois public school students regarding their school experiences--how they describe their teachers and peers, their classes, and their own efforts. Data were gathered through a survey that was administered during May and June 1994 to a total of 39,000 6th-, 8th-, and 10th-grade students in Chicago Public Schools. Students expressed the most positive attitudes toward their teachers. Elementary school students reported higher levels of engagement when teachers demonstrated keen personal interest in them and also pressed them toward academic work. Although African-American students were less likely than other student groups to report feeling safe, there was considerable variation among African-American schools. The data also suggest that academic standards for many students are too low. The most negative reports of learning climates came from 10th-graders, who were subject to rising absenteeism and course failure. A conclusion is that good instruction rests on a base of human and social resources. The findings support the viability of the Chicago school-improvement framework, which posits the importance of five essential supports for student learning: school leadership, parent involvement, professional development and collaboration, a student-centered learning climate, and quality instructional programs. (Contains 49 references.) (LMI)

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Charting Reform in Chicago: The Students Speak

A Report Sponsored by the Consortium on Chicago School Research

July 1996

Background

Student-Centered Learning Climate

Academic Engagement and School Participation

Academic Difficulty during the High School Transition

A Closer Look at Low-Achieving Elementary Schools

Interpretive Summary

Reference List

Penny Bender Sebring, Consortium on Chicago School Research
Anthony S. Bryk, University of Chicago, Center for School Improvement
Melissa Roderick, University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration
Eric Camburn, Consortium on Chicago School Research

Stuart Luppescu, Consortium on Chicago School Research
Yeow Meng Thum, Consortium on Chicago School Research
BetsAnn Smith, Consortium on Chicago School Research
Joseph Kahne, University of Illinois at Chicago

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The data used to prepare this report and its companion volume, *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*, are available on a compact disc. The CD also contains the public-release data sets from the Consortium's first two surveys: *Charting Reform: The Teacher's Turn* (1991) and *Charting Reform: The Principal's Perspective* (1992). Included are SAS programs that read the data; however, the data are in ASCII format and can be read by any statistical package. Anyone interested in obtaining this CD should contact the Consortium.

Acknowledgments

A study of this scope requires the talents and skills of many different individuals, and we wish to thank and acknowledge the people who contributed significantly to the success of this project. Yeow Meng Thum organized and maintained multiple, large data files, and he and Stuart Luppescu conducted a wealth of statistical analyses. Stuart Luppescu developed the scales that frame the report. BetsAnn Smith wrote case descriptions of Esperanza Elementary School and Marsalis High School. Joseph Kahne, University of Illinois at Chicago, contributed the account of Manley High School.

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Brad Raymond, Hyde Park Academy
Sherra Taylor, Hyde Park Academy
Chanel Wheeler, Hyde Park Academy
Charmaine Williams, Kenwood Academy
Shana Young, Kenwood Academy

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This report reflects the interpretations of the authors. Although the Consortium Steering Committee provided technical advice and reviewed an earlier version of the report, no formal endorsement by these individuals, their organizations or the full Consortium should be assumed.

Background

This report seeks to give voice to students regarding their school experiences—how they describe their teachers and peers, their classes, and their own efforts. Our intent in offering this analysis is to convey the state of affairs in the Chicago Public Schools as students see them. Understanding this "student sense" is important for decision makers, both in local school communities and throughout the system. Unless school improvement efforts truly touch students' minds and hearts and become manifest in their behavior and attitudes, the ultimate aims of school reform will go unmet.

We focus on the upper elementary and early high school years, with particular attention to the transition to high school. As they reach high school, large percentages of students confront serious academic difficulties, begin to disengage from school, fail many of their courses, and ultimately drop out of school. Clearly, an understanding of these problems is needed before effective policies and practices can be designed to begin to reverse this disastrous trend.

SECOND IN A SERIES

This is the second report in a series. The series provides information to school leaders, educators, policy makers, and the public regarding the degree to which schools across the city have begun to adopt practices that are central to Chicago's framework for school improvement—the five essential supports for student learning. Based on broad research on urban school improvement, this framework posits that improvements in student learning require effective school leadership, parental involvement, professional development and collaboration among teachers, a climate focused on student learning, and quality instructional programs.[1]

The first three essential supports were examined in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*, which was released in 1995.[2] This second report considers the fourth essential support: a student-centered learning climate. This encompasses school safety and order, teachers' personal concerns about students, and their expectations for serious academic work. The report also examines student engagement and effort, with a particular focus on disengagement and academic failure in high schools. Finally, we synthesize what we have learned about four of the five essential supports—school leadership, parental involvement, professional development and collaboration, and

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student-centered learning climate—as they relate to schools with the lowest academic performance in the city.

A third report, forthcoming later this year, will focus on the last and most significant of the essential supports, a quality instructional program. The Consortium will share results of its three-year study of teaching and learning in Chicago's schools. Based on extensive interviews, survey results, and more than 1,000 classroom observations, this study will examine instructional practices and the learning opportunities afforded to students. Another study detailing trends in student achievement over the last nine years also will be released this year. Taken together, this set of reports will offer the most comprehensive assessment ever assembled of the efforts of a major urban center to reform its public schools.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Evidence for this report is taken from surveys of sixth-, eighth-, and tenth-grade students which occurred during spring 1994. Since students' views on some matters deviate from those offered by teachers in our previous report, and both of these differ somewhat from those of "outside researchers" looking at school activities, this report also draws on interviews with students and researchers' observations. Three short case studies of schools and six narratives about individual students are included. In addition, we drew on tenth graders' transcript records to examine their course experiences. Comparing across information collected through these different research methods permits us to develop a more comprehensive understanding of students' experiences.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

The report begins with general student views about their experiences in the Chicago Public Schools. Consistent with our previous reports, these systemwide average responses provide a context for introducing the main ideas that frame the report and the basis for the more detailed analyses that follow.

It is important to remember that

How the Surveys Were Developed and Administered

In 1994, as Chicago completed the fifth year under school reform, the Consortium launched its third and fourth surveys in the *Charting Reform* series. Teachers and students in 266 elementary and 50 high schools took part. In all, 39,000 students completed surveys, along with 6,200 elementary school teachers and 2,600 high school teachers.[3]

Work on these surveys began in fall 1993, as work groups were assembled to identify key ideas for the study and procedures for data collection. These groups involved researchers from local universities, independent organizations, and the school system. As is customary in all Consortium projects, the survey development and planning were greatly influenced by a diverse group of stakeholders. Teacher and student advisory committees played a major role in creating and conducting these surveys. Elementary and high school teachers and students discussed and reviewed materials and procedures during survey development. Teachers and students also pilot-tested many new survey questions and provided us with feedback on the content of the surveys. After the data collection was complete, teachers and students helped review basic findings to sharpen our interpretations.

In addition to the teacher and student advisory groups, we held numerous formal and informal discussions across the city with important local constituencies. We sought ideas and reactions from a broad base of civic and political leadership through our Constituent Advisory Board. We also drew on assistance from many national experts who critically reviewed technical aspects of the surveys. The work groups collected numerous surveys from other school districts, from nationally funded research projects, and from school improvement efforts. These many sources helped us shape surveys that provide a fair and accurate picture of how students and teachers perceive their school experiences and how Chicago's unique reform is progressing.

The surveys were administered in May and June 1994 to sixth-, eighth-, and tenth-grade students and to elementary and high school teachers. A Spanish language version was available for students. Students completed the surveys during a class, and teachers filled out surveys during faculty meetings or on their own.

In 1995, the Consortium provided individually tailored reports to all schools that participated in the study.[4] These reports were designed to help schools assess their strengths and weaknesses and the effectiveness of improvement efforts under way. Schools were encouraged to use these data as part of a larger self-analysis supported by the Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

the student views described in the opening section can vary widely across the 550 schools that make up the system. As we know from the state's ranking of schools on student achievement, Chicago has both some of the highest and some of the lowest achieving schools in Illinois. In addition, as we have documented in our previous reports, the effects of reform, and more generally of schools' efforts at improvement, have differed greatly. Thus, we expect variation among schools in how students perceive their environments. For these reasons, we move beyond a general assessment of students' views to a more detailed analysis of how these responses vary among different kinds of students and schools.

Much of the data presented here are students' perceptions. As such, they reflect students' social reality—how they make sense of the world they live in, the kinds of behavior they create within it, and how they describe all of this to others.

Some of the reports students gave us about their educational experiences and engagement with schooling appear quite negative. In considering these accounts, there is a natural tendency to "blame the victim"—to locate the cause, the explanation for the observations, primarily in the persons telling us about them. That is certainly not our intent, and we want to explicitly caution the reader against this. There is ample evidence that urban schools that use effective school practices can engage and educate disadvantaged youth.[3] Moreover, we strongly believe that it is the responsibility of all adults, both inside and outside schools, to create the conditions that make these practices more commonplace.

THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN CHICAGO

By devolving authority to local schools, the 1988 Chicago School Reform Act sought to weaken central power in the school system and to promote greater site-based control. Reform gave principals greater authority over the school budget, the physical building, and personnel decisions. For the first time, principals, freed from seniority requirements, were able to recruit and hire new teachers. Having lost their tenure and now accountable to elected, parent-dominated Local School Councils (LSCs), principals were encouraged to redirect initiatives toward local constituencies and their concerns.

The reform package created a real voice for parents and community members. In addition to the principal, six parents and two community representatives serve on the LSC. (In high schools, there is a student representative as well.) These councils have the power to hire and fire the school principal and to approve the budget and a mandated School Improvement Plan (SIP). To guide the local school change process, the Chicago School Reform Act also formulated explicit educational goals for children and an extended set of school objectives.

Teachers also were given an expanded voice. Through their two seats on the LSC, they have direct influence on school affairs, including the choice of the principal. Teachers also have advisory responsibility over school curriculum and instruction through the teacher-elected Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC).

New resources also became available to support school improvements. The law changed how state compensatory education funds (state Chapter 1 funds) were to be used. Money now flows to each school based on the number of disadvantaged students. Schools with many disadvantaged students received substantial increases in discretionary dollars and greater freedom in how they could be spent.

By spring 1994, when the student and teacher surveys were administered, three LSC elections had occurred—in 1989, 1991, and 1993. In addition, schools were implementing their fourth SIP and school budget, and were developing plans for the fifth year.

In spring 1995, a year after the data were collected for this report, the Illinois state legislature passed a second major Chicago school reform bill. The act ceded vast powers and responsibilities to the city's mayor for control over the school system, including direct appointment of the Reform Board of Trustees without review by any nominating committee. It created a new administrative structure that vested substantial powers in a Chief Executive Officer, who is directly appointed by the mayor. The CEO post replaces the position of superintendent.

The 1995 Act also extended budget and accounting flexibility to the school system. It struck down numerous positions on collective bargaining which previously were secure in state law. (Some of these provisions, however, became part of the contract between the teachers' union and the school system.)

A key element of the law was stronger central authority to identify and intervene in non-improving schools. Specific provisions were incorporated to permit school reconstitution. These included: vacating an LSC, terminating a principals' contract, and revoking teacher tenure in these schools. A new accountability

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council also was established and charged with developing and implementing a plan of periodic review of all CPS schools. Taken together, these provisions created substantial new degrees of freedom for policy and administrative activity by the new Reform Board of Trustees and Chief Executive Officer.

At the same time, the new law sustained and strengthened the democratic localism which was a key part of the earlier school reform law. To improve LSC functioning, for example, the law assured that new LSC members would receive training. Principals' powers were extended to include supervision and personnel evaluation of all school site staff. A cumbersome process for removing incompetent staff, which had been a major complaint of principals, also was further streamlined. Finally, schools were assured that their primary source of discretionary funds, state Chapter 1 dollars, would not be cut for purposes of balancing the system budget.

Although the surveys were administered prior to some of these changes, students' responses addressed a broad set of enduring educational issues—the learning environment of the school, classroom instruction, and their own motivation and engagement. Since these conditions, behaviors, and attitudes generally are not subject to rapid change, we believe the survey results are still broadly applicable and deserve serious consideration by school leaders, educators, parents, and the public.

Section I

Student-Centered Learning Climate

By Penny Bender Sebring and Anthony S. Bryk

A large percentage of students in urban schools do not achieve because they are not engaged with the school and its academic mission. Many students do not come to school at all; others attend only sporadically and without much commitment. They may comply with school routines but gain little because they do not see the work that they are asked to do as meaningful and worthwhile.[1]

Research on the improvement of urban schools has documented the importance of a positive school climate for cultivating higher levels of student interest and engagement. Schools that promote achievement share three principal characteristics: they are safe, orderly, and respectful; they demand that students do significant academic work; and the teachers and staff work hard to provide students with moral and personal support. Such schools can be found in many inner-city neighborhoods across the United States.[2]

This section summarizes Chicago students' perceptions about the climate of the schools they attend. It examines variation in these reports among different types of students and schools, and explores the factors that promote a more positive learning climate.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE LEARNING CLIMATE IN THEIR SCHOOLS

We asked students about many different aspects of their school and how they experienced it. We included topics such as the personal concern that teachers show them, the degree

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Chicago Schools, Students, and Their Families

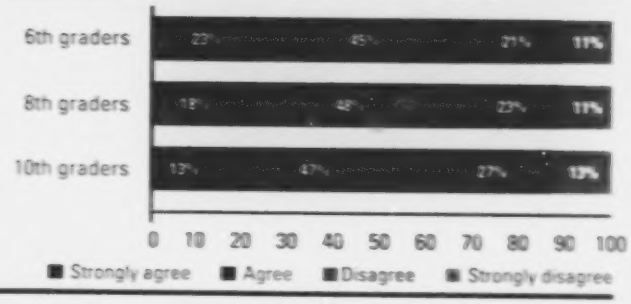
The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) enroll about 413,000 students in 550 schools. Of these, 477 elementary schools serve students in grades kindergarten through eight, and 73 high schools serve students in grades nine through twelve. About 310,000 Chicago students (75 percent of the total enrollment) attend elementary schools, and 103,000 students go to high schools.[3]

Significant social and economic challenges face many Chicago youth:

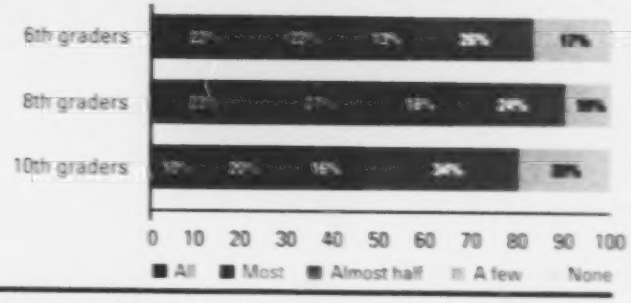
- Between 1980 and 1990, Chicago youth attending public schools became more disadvantaged. In 1980, 36 percent of public school children lived in poverty; by 1990 this proportion had risen to 41 percent.
- The student poverty rate in Chicago is four times higher than in the suburban Cook County schools. The proportion of poor children in Chicago (41 percent) is also higher than in both New York (35 percent) and Los Angeles (33 percent).
- The median household income for children enrolled in Chicago Public Schools dropped from $25,600 in 1980 to $22,000 in 1990 (in 1990 dollars).
- The percentage of public school households headed by an unmarried person rose from 44 percent in 1980 to 51 percent in 1990.
- The percentages of white and African-American students have decreased, while the percentage of Hispanic students has increased. In 1980, 19 percent of the students were white and 59 percent were African-American, while in 1990, these proportions were 13 percent and 56 percent. The proportion of Hispanic students has grown from 20 percent to 28 percent.
- Between 1985 and 1994, the number of reported incidents of child abuse and neglect in the city of Chicago increased from 12,700 to 19,600.
- In 1988, 67 percent of the students who entered the state-funded preschool programs scored below average on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. By 1994, this had climbed to 79 percent.[4]

In fairness, it must be recognized that many poor parents work very hard to provide for their children, encourage them in school, and closely monitor their behavior. We also know that many children display remarkable resilience in confronting quite adverse conditions. Nonetheless, in aggregate, the data presented above clearly indicate that an increasing number of Chicago students lack basic economic and social supports that can help them succeed at school and deal with challenges in their neighborhoods. Such children often enter school unprepared for learning and experience frustration, humiliation, and failure. Unless there is a vigilant staff to provide support and spot difficulties, these children are likely to become discouraged and disillusioned. It does not take many negative experiences for a student to begin disengaging from school.[5] For these reasons, strong school environments are needed: where children are safe and nurtured, where students are treated with respect, and where they are encouraged to succeed at challenging and meaningful tasks. After all, "These children have no life options for achieving decent lives other than by experiencing success in school."[6]

Teachers notice if I am having trouble learning something

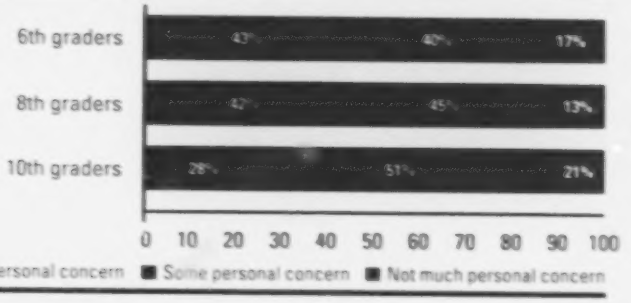


Teachers are willing to help with personal problems



The majority of sixth, eighth, and tenth graders indicate that their teachers watch them closely enough to know when they are having trouble learning. Helping students with personal problems, however, is more demanding and, not surprisingly, half or fewer of the elementary students sense that most of their teachers would provide such support. Tenth graders are the most circumspect about their teachers, with fewer saying teachers notice if they are having trouble, and more than half reporting that few or none of their teachers help with personal problems.

Personalism



to which teachers press them to work towards high academic standards, how much effort their friends put forth in school, the behavior of other students, and school safety. For some questions, we are able to compare the views of Chicago students to students in other cities in the United States, who have responded to the same survey items in other studies.

Personalism

Previous research has shown that one of the most effective ways to encourage children in learning is to make them feel personally known and cared for. A personalized environment is especially important in urban contexts, where many students feel anonymous or left out.[5] In classrooms, this means teachers must know their students as individual *learners*, with specific knowledge, skills, and personal needs.[6]

In this regard, we asked students a series of questions about their relationships with teachers. They ranged from whether students believed their teachers knew them and noticed if they were absent, to questions about whether students felt that teachers cared about them and listened to their concerns. Other questions dealt with whether their teachers noticed if students were having trouble learning and whether teachers were willing to help students with personal problems.

We created an overall personalism scale that summarizes students' reports about teachers' involvement with them, based on the four questions described above plus questions about teachers knowing their students, having confidence in their ability, helping them catch up after an absence, and not "putting students down" in class. One end of the scale represents teachers showing *considerable personal concern*, while the other end represents teachers demonstrating *not much personal concern*.

In general, elementary school students are quite positive about their teachers. More than 40 percent of the sixth- and eighth-graders' responses suggest that teachers show *considerable personal concern*. These students claim that teachers care about them, listen to what they have to say, notice if they are having trouble learning something, help

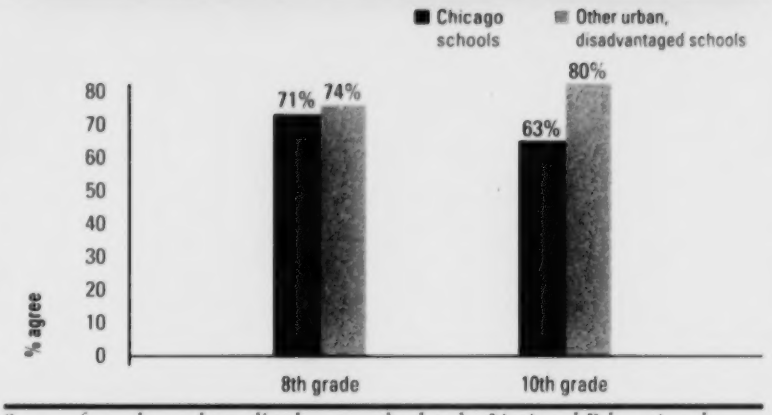
them catch up after being absent, and most teachers are willing to help with personal problems. Another 40 to 45 percent of the sixth and eighth graders judge that their teachers show *some personal concern*. These students portray their teachers similarly to those who say their teachers show considerable personal concern, except they see their teachers as less concerned about absences and less likely to help with personal problems. Thirteen to 17 percent of the students characterize their teachers as showing *not much personal concern*. While a few teachers might offer help, these students generally feel that their teachers do not care about them, listen to them, or notice if they are having trouble.

There is a sharp drop-off as we shift attention to high schools. Only 28 percent of the tenth graders, compared to 42 percent of the eighth graders, indicate that teachers show them *considerable personal concern*. Similarly, more than 20 percent of the tenth graders, compared to only 13 percent of the eighth graders, think their teachers show *not much personal concern*.[11]

These results signal potentially important school organization effects. In general, high schools are larger and more complex environments where students typically have less opportunity to sustain meaningful interactions with their teachers. In addition, high school teachers tend to view their work as "teaching subject matter" rather than "teaching students." Not surprisingly, their students are likely to experience high schools as more impersonal environments, unless deliberate efforts are taken by the adults to moderate these effects.

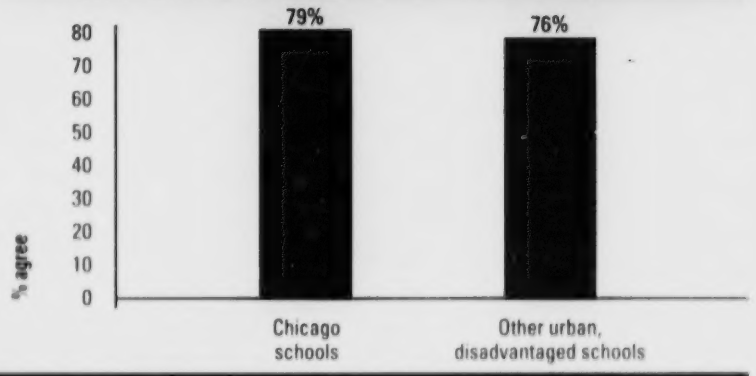
In order to illustrate the considerable variation among schools on questions regarding personalism, we compared student responses in the top and bottom quarters of the elementary and high schools on this scale. That is, we compared students' responses from schools with the highest ratings on personalism to students' responses from schools with the lowest ratings on personalism. (The responses from students in all schools is shown as a standard for overall comparison.) In the top-rated elementary schools, 64 percent of the students indicate teachers show *con-*

National Comparison
Most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say



Source for other urban, disadvantaged schools: *National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988: Base and First Follow-up*

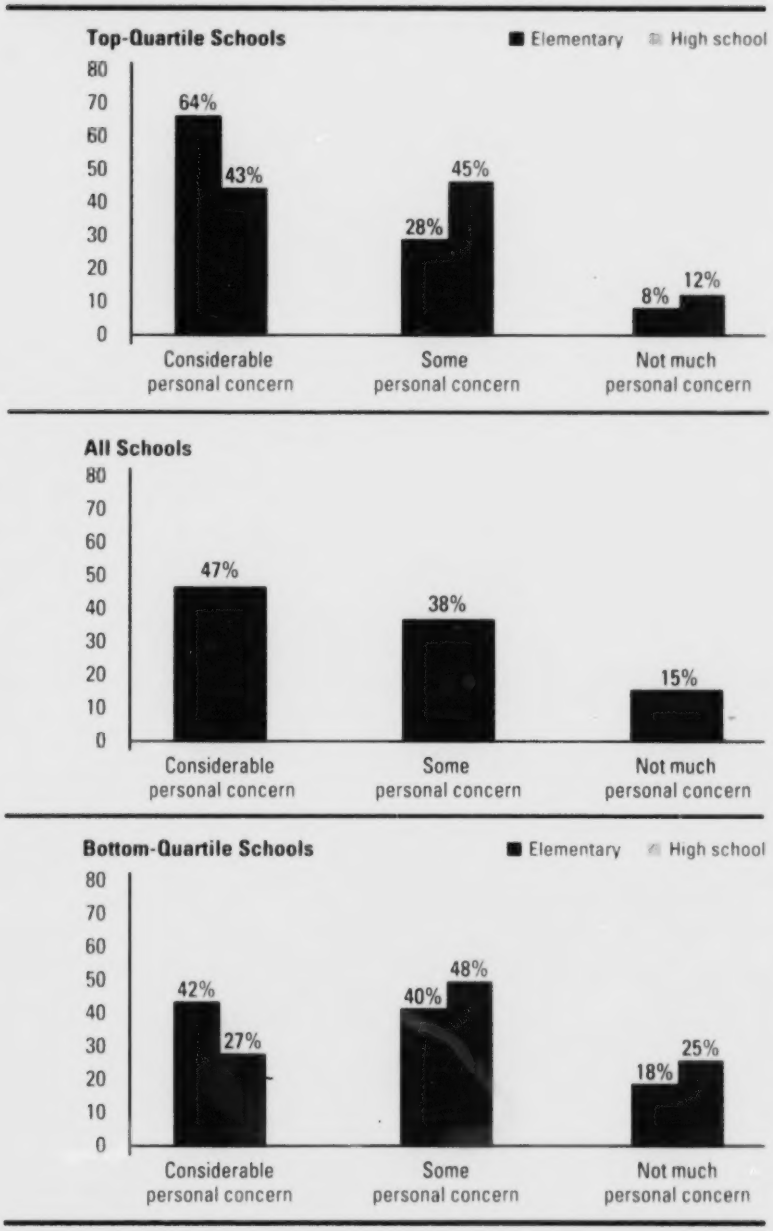
National Comparison
Teachers really care about students
Eighth Grade Students



Source for other urban, disadvantaged schools: *National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988: Base Year*

The majority of students in Chicago agree with these statements. Responses of eighth graders in Chicago are similar to those of eighth graders in other urban, economically disadvantaged schools. At the high school level, however, there is a noticeable discrepancy. Tenth graders in Chicago are considerably less positive than their counterparts in other urban centers regarding whether teachers listen to them.[12]

Personalism
Students' Responses in High- and Low-Rated Schools



siderable personal concern; in contrast, only 42 percent in low-rated schools offer similar reports. Thus, in the top quarter of the Chicago public elementary schools, the majority of students indicate that teachers have succeeded in establishing a pervasive ethic of caring. Among the high schools there was somewhat less variation—43 percent of the students in top-rated schools report *considerable personal concern* as do 27 percent of students in low-rated schools.

This comparison also dramatizes differences between elementary and high schools. Students in the top-rated high schools offer reports about personalism similar to those from students in low-rated elementary schools. For example, 43 percent of the students in top-rated high schools report *considerable personal concern* from their teachers, compared to 42 percent of students in low-rated elementary schools.

In general, students' views about their teachers were among the most positive reports they offered. Particularly at the elementary level, high percentages of students indicate healthy and productive relationships with their teachers. This is an important building block for school success.

Press toward Academic Achievement

Good feelings about school, uncoupled from rigorous academic work, however, are not enough. Teachers' personal concern must be linked to instructional activity. An effective classroom is one in which teachers combine caring with high standards regarding academic work.[12] Schools with high levels of academic press expect students to work on intellectually challenging tasks, to come to class prepared, and to complete all homework assignments.

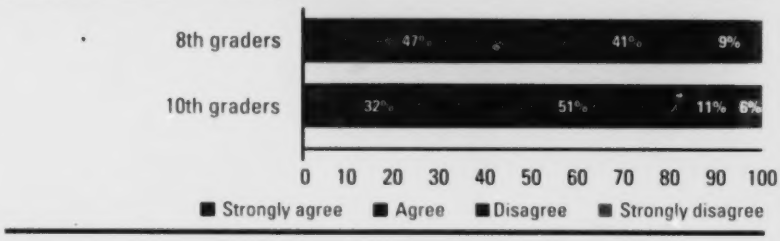
Eighth- and tenth-grade students were asked several questions about teachers' expectations of them in their language arts/English, mathematics, social studies, and science classes.[13] (The sixth-grade questionnaire was shorter and did not contain subject-specific questions.) These questions asked students whether their teachers expect them to do well, expect homework to be done, provide extra work and help as needed, and praise them when they do well.

In general, students indicated that they receive clear messages regarding the importance of working hard and doing well. On the press toward academic achievement scale, which combines the responses to all questions in this series, 38 percent of the eighth graders and 30 percent of the tenth graders sense a *strong press* toward academic work. These students strongly agree that their teachers expect them to do their best and complete all their homework, and they sense that their teachers are concerned if they do not complete homework and do not earn good grades. These students also indicate that their teachers praise them when they do well and are willing to give extra help if they need it.

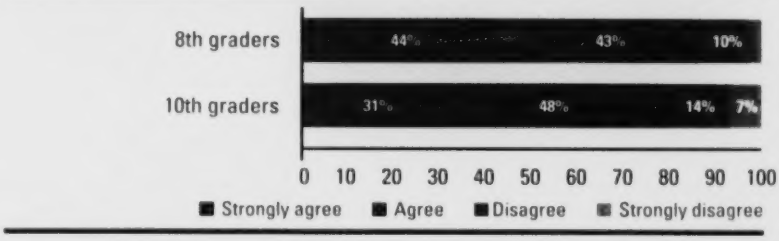
The largest group of students at both grades experience *moderate academic press*. These students agree with the first group that teachers want them to do well and expect them to complete assignments, but they are less likely to say that their teachers encourage extra work when they do not understand something or that their teachers are willing to give extra help. Even though this group is somewhat more guarded, they still report receiving strong messages about working up to their potential.

A relatively small percentage of students in both grades indicate *weak academic press*. This group reports that while teachers expect students to complete their work, only a few care about whether students do their homework or are willing to give extra help. These students also feel that their teachers do not praise them for doing well. Tenth graders again offer more negative ratings than eighth graders do.

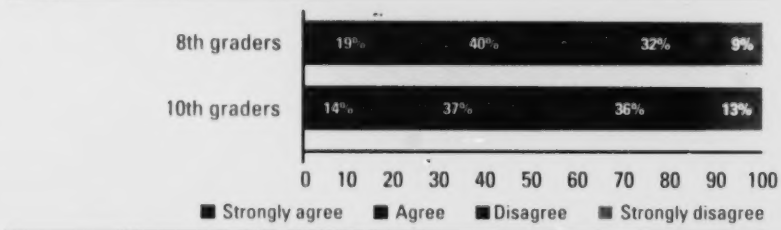
My math teacher expects me to complete my homework every night



My math teacher expects me to do my best all the time



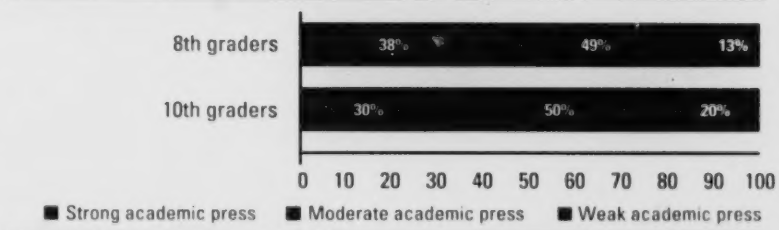
My math teacher encourages extra work when I don't understand



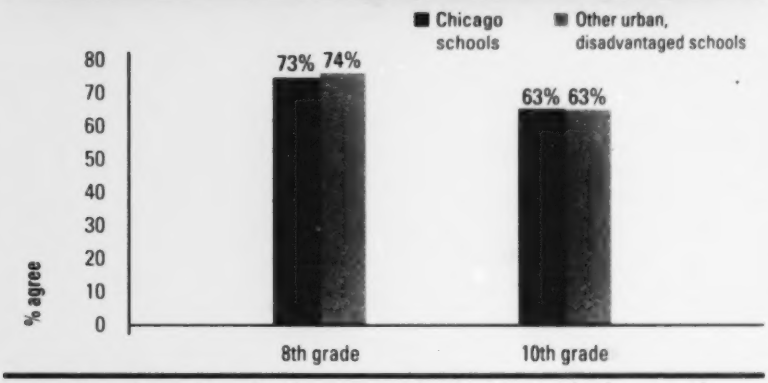
Note: Due to limited space, numbers for 5 percent or less are not shown

Students' reports of teacher expectations in math are comparable to those of other subjects. Although the responses from tenth graders are somewhat weaker than those from eighth graders, the overwhelming majority of students indicate that their teachers expect them to do their work and to do it well. However, students indicate that teachers do not always follow up by giving them extra work if they are confused.

Press toward Academic Achievement



National Comparison
When I work hard on school work, my teachers praise my efforts



Source for other urban, disadvantaged schools: *National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988.*

Responses of students in Chicago mirror those of students in other cities. While the majority of tenth graders in both samples agree with this statement, they are less positive than eighth graders are.

We also examined differences among schools on this scale. In the bottom quarter of the elementary schools, only 38 percent of the students indicate *strong academic press* (next page). Among top-rated schools, a majority of students, more than 60 percent, provide such a rating. Reports from high schools are generally lower and somewhat less variable, ranging from 30 percent of the students reporting *strong academic press* in low-rated schools to 45 percent in top-rated schools.

It appears that teachers in many elementary schools have succeeded in conveying a strong message to most students regarding the importance of working hard and doing well in school. In the best of

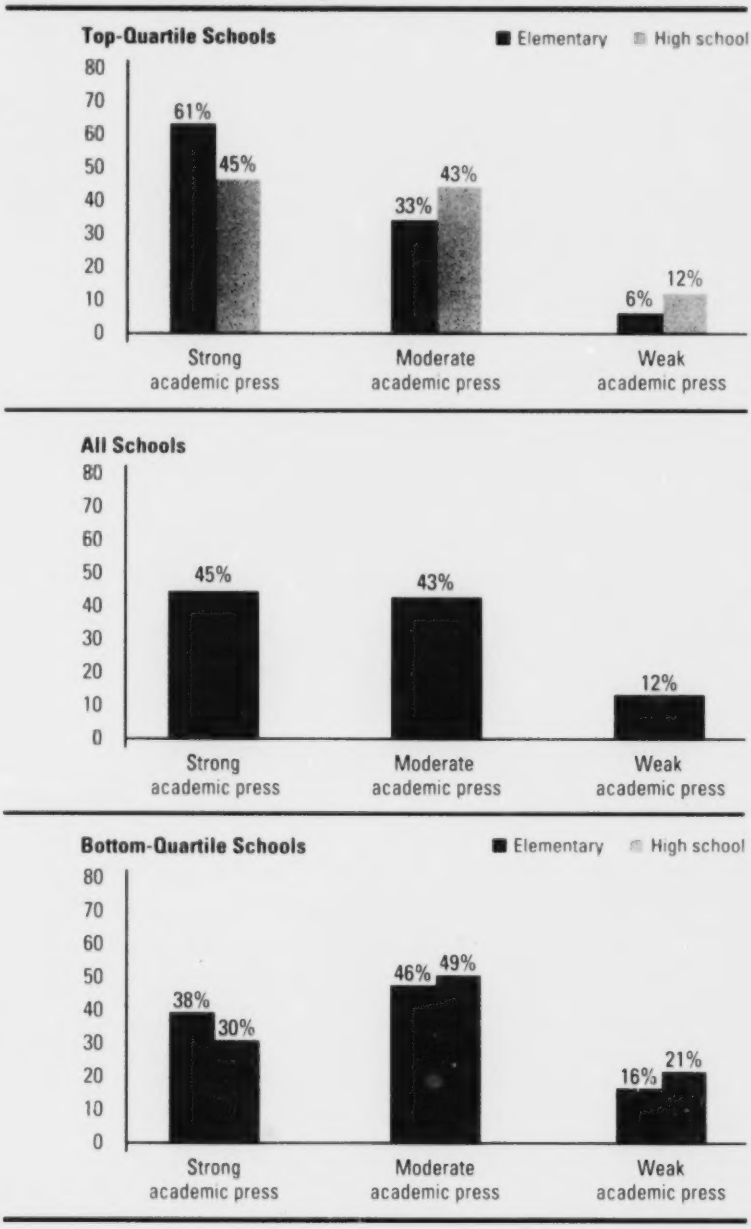
these schools, an orientation toward academic work appears normative and schoolwide. It is significant that there are virtually no high schools where an orientation toward academic work is the norm.

Combined impact of personalism and academic press. It is not uncommon in debates on school reform to hear calls for more rigorous instruction and higher academic standards. At the same time, others emphasize making classroom instruction more interesting and personally engaging for students. Although these two points of view may appear at odds, in fact, they are not. Rather, our analyses indicate a need for integrating both perspectives.

To examine the relative influence of personalism and academic press on student engagement, we divided schools into nine categories according to whether their average ratings on personalism and press toward academic achievement were low, moderate, or high. For example, some schools were characterized as low on both dimensions and others moderate on one and high and the other, and still others high on both. For each category of schools, we examined students' reports about their own academic efforts in school (see academic engagement scale described in Section II).

Our analyses indicate that personalism, by itself, appears to have a small influence on students' engagement in learning, and the same is true of academic press. But the combination of the two elevates academic engagement substantially. That is, the most positive reports from students about academic engagement come from schools which students rate high on both personalism and press toward academic achievement.

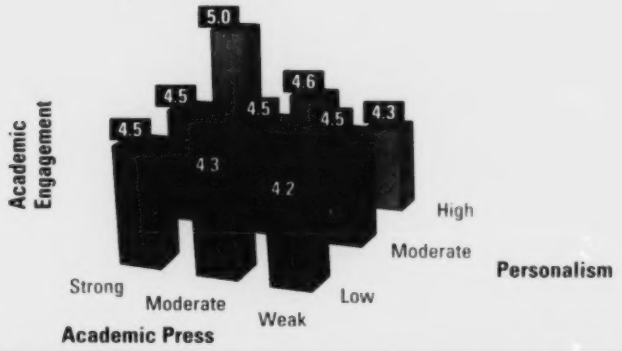
Press toward Academic Achievement
Students' Responses in High- and Low-Rated Schools



Peer Support for Academic Work

Peer groups exercise considerable influence on students, especially during adolescence. Thus, a critical element of a school's climate is the behavior and attitudes of a student's peers regarding commitment to academic work. In schools where most students believe they should try to do well, peer influence will be

Influence of Academic Press and Personalism on Academic Engagement Elementary Schools

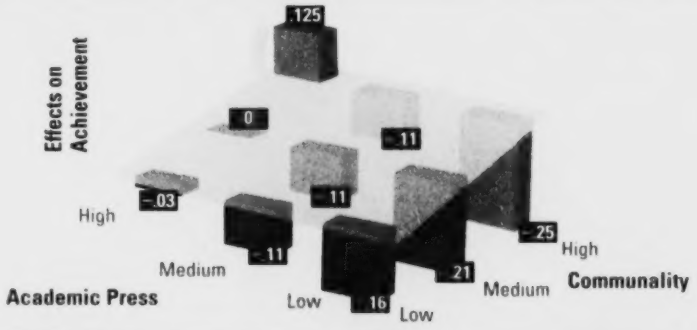


Note: All the scales constructed for this graph were placed on a 0 to 10 point scale. The level of academic engagement in schools where students report high personalism and strong press toward academic achievement is significantly higher than in any other category of schools.

Personalism, Academic Press, and Achievement

Research on urban Catholic high schools shows that many of these schools are very effective with low-income and minority students. These schools have clear and strongly-held norms regarding what students should learn, and they demand that all students, regardless of their background, follow a rigorous academic program of study. At the same time, there is a strong sense of community. Teachers have plenty of opportunities to interact with students and express genuine personal concern for them.[14]

Influence of Academic Press and Communality on Academic Achievement
A National Sample of Schools Serving Low-Income Students



Similar results have been reported in a recent study of effective secondary education among a national sample of high schools serving high proportions of low-income students. Shouse finds that the highest average achievement occurs when there is a dual emphasis on high academic press and communality.[15] (The definition of communality in this study—mutual support and caring for students—is closely related to the concept of personalism used in our Chicagò study.)

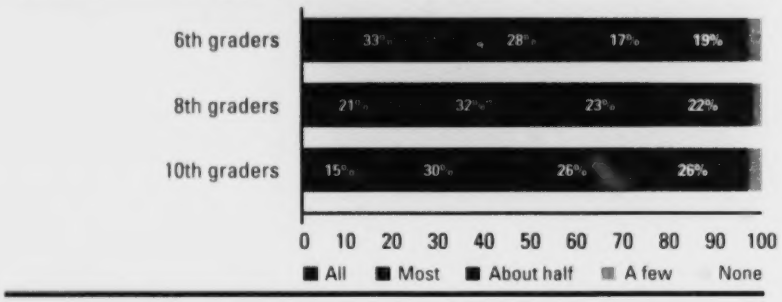
Schools exhibiting high academic press have more demanding course requirements, and they have policies that promote attendance and orderly behavior. Teachers emphasize the absolute level of achievement in determining student grades, require homework regularly, provide corrective feedback to students, and contact parents if students are performing poorly. High communality was characterized by shared values among teachers regarding educational beliefs and values, including the conviction that students *are* capable of learning the material being taught. Students report that teachers listen to what they have to say and care about them. High proportions of students were involved in sports or other extracurricular activities.

positive; in schools where the prevailing norms are weak and students are more lackadaisical, students will feel less motivated. Consequently, we asked students questions about how many of their friends try hard to get good grades, attend all their classes, feel it is important to pay attention in class, think doing homework is important, and follow school rules.

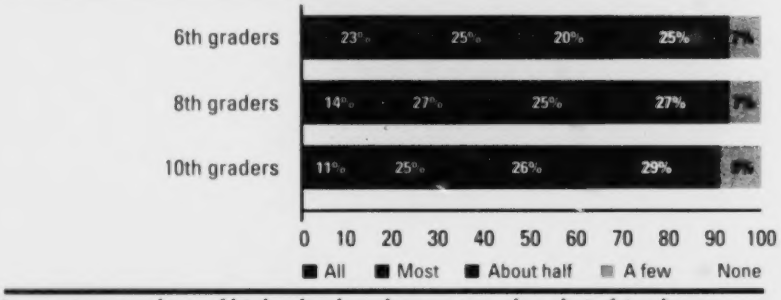
Results show wide variation in the efforts friends make and also reveal a declining level of commitment across grades. For example, among sixth graders, 61 percent answered that all or most of their friends try hard to get good grades; 53 percent of the eighth graders say this is true of their friends, but only 45 percent of the tenth graders claim this is so. These reports are consistent with research that has tracked students over time and documented a "cooling out" phenomenon as students move into and through high school.[16]

In order to summarize the results of the questions regarding peers' efforts, we created a scale based on the five questions mentioned above, with students reporting *strong support* for academic work at one end and students reporting *minimal support* at the other. Among sixth and eighth graders, almost half indicate *strong* or *moderate support* for academic

How many of your friends in this school try hard to get good grades?

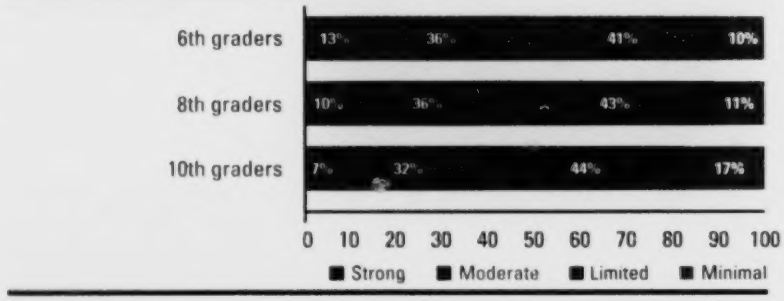


How many of your friends in this school think doing homework is important?

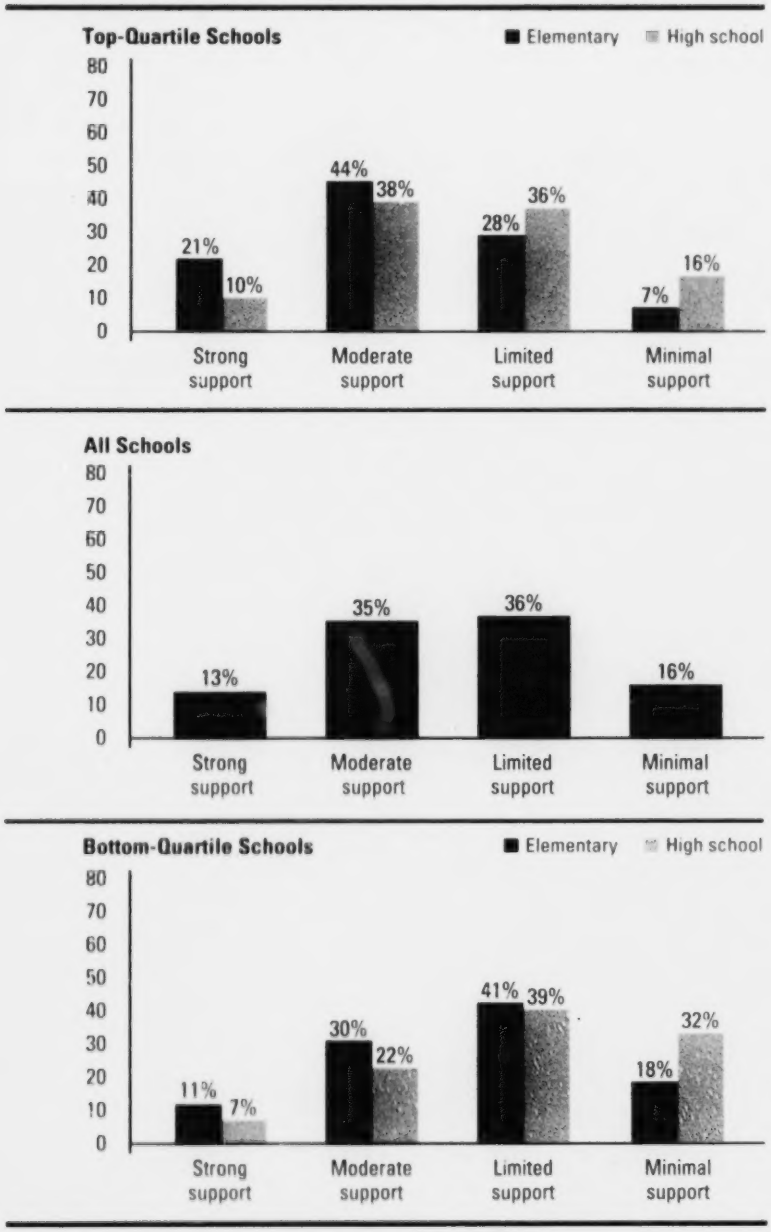


Increasing numbers of high school students report that their friends are disengaged from academic work.

Peer Support for Academic Work



Peer Support for Academic Work
Students' Responses in High- and Low-Rated Schools



work among their friends. These students see all or most of their friends as working hard. They try hard to get good grades, feel it is important to attend and pay attention in all their classes, and think doing homework is important. Fewer high school students—39 percent—make such claims about their friends. Peer support is classified as *limited* or *minimal* for more than half the students at each of the three grades. These students generally report that half or fewer of their friends work hard and think it is important to pay attention in class and do homework.

The strength of these academic norms varies from one school to another. Among the weakest elementary schools, almost 60 percent of the students indicate *limited* or *minimal support*. In these schools, only a small minority of students report that all or most of their friends try hard in school. In contrast, 65 percent of the students in top-rated elementary schools report *strong* or *moderate support*. With two out of three students saying that all or most of their friends work hard, these schools appear to maintain strong norms regarding effort and achievement.

Among high schools, the percentage of students indicating *strong* or *moderate support* varies from 29 percent in the low-rated schools to 48 percent in the top-rated schools. Again, we found that the level of peer support for academic work is much lower in high schools, and that the top quarter of the high schools resembles the bottom quarter of the elementary schools on this scale.

Classroom Behavior

Previous research has pointed to the importance of an orderly and secure environment in providing a supportive context for instruction.[17] And there is ample evidence that inner-city schools can maintain such environments without removing large numbers of children from school.[18] To understand these dynamics in Chicago classrooms, we gathered information about students' behavior in language arts/English, mathematics, social studies, and science classes. Eighth- and tenth-grade students were asked whether students help each other in class, make fun of students who do well in class, or disrupt class often.

Over 60 percent of the students in both eighth and tenth grade report that classmates help each other and do not make fun of the students who do well. Counterbalancing this, how-

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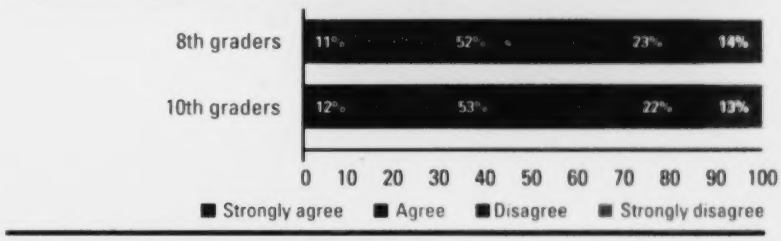
ever, a majority also indicate that other students often disrupt class. These results suggest that, while most students find classmates helpful and respectful, their classes are often disrupted by students.

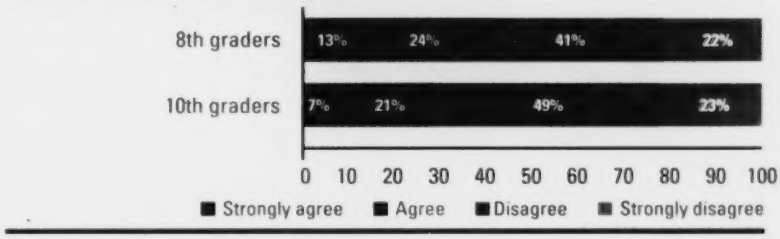
Once again, we combined into a scale the questions about behavior in language arts/English, mathematics, social studies, and science classes. At one end of the scale are cooperative classrooms, and at the other end are classrooms characterized by very disruptive behavior. Only a small percentage of eighth and tenth graders report that their classes are *cooperative*. In these classes, students help each other and generally do not disrupt class. Students in these classrooms also report that their peers do not make fun of the students who do well. Half the tenth graders and almost half the eighth graders describe their classes as *somewhat cooperative*. In these situations, students are more likely to help each other than to make fun of each other, but there remains a group of students who often disrupt instruction.

Almost half the eighth graders and more than one-third of the tenth graders rate their classes as *disruptive* or *very disruptive*. In these classes, there is little mutual help, students tend to make fun of one another, and they often disrupt class. It is worth noting that tenth-grade students give more positive ratings to their classes than eighth-grade students do. This is one of the few instances in the student survey in which eighth-grade students are more negative than tenth graders. This suggests that upper elementary grades in many schools are experiencing significant disruptions to instruction. This observation should not to be overlooked in an otherwise relatively positive set of reports from elementary school students.

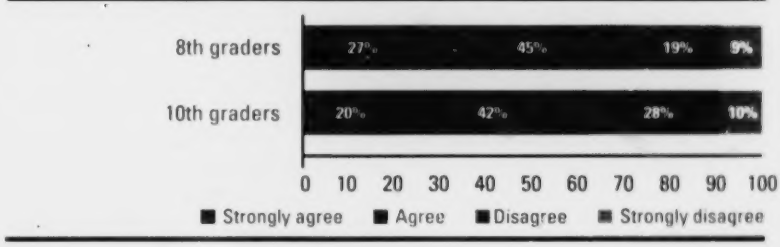
Students help each other in language arts/English class



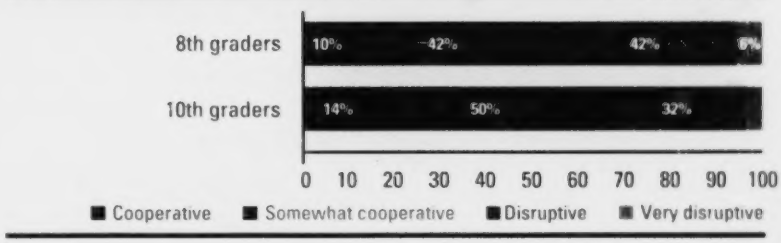
Students make fun of students who do well in language arts/English class



Other students often disrupt language arts/English class

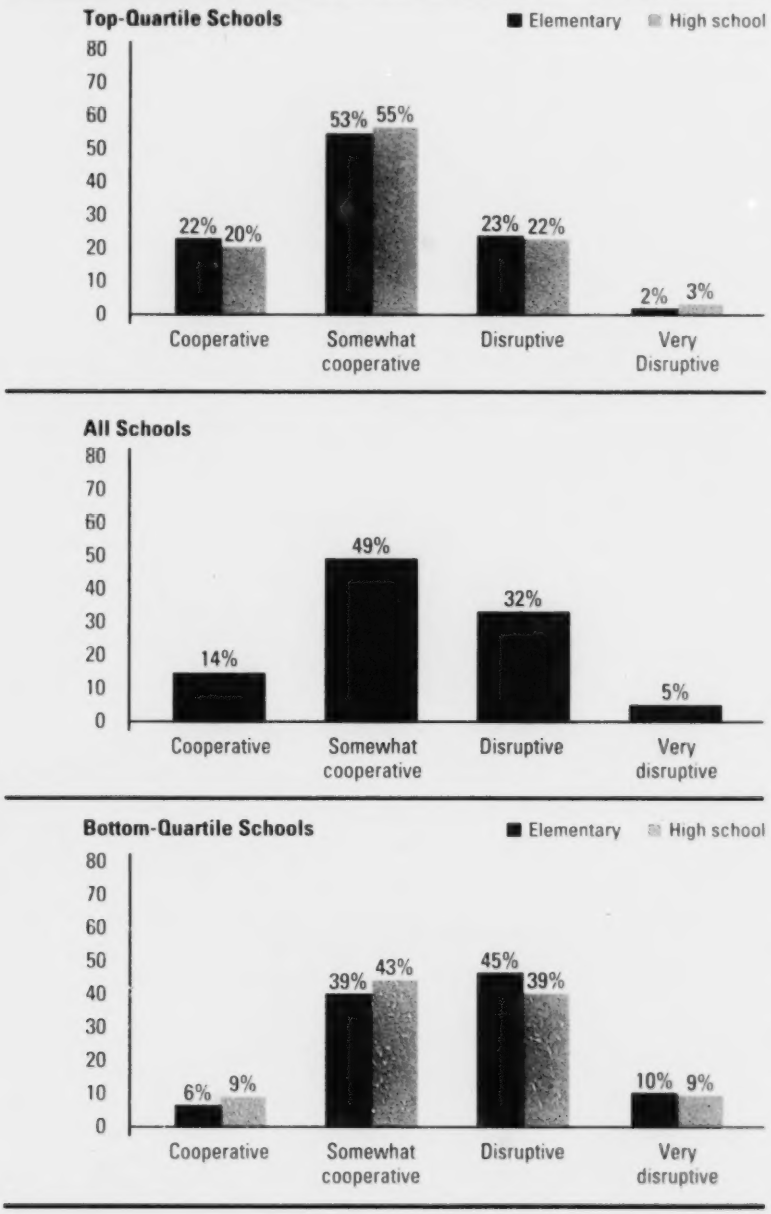


Classroom Behavior



We note that teachers generally corroborated students' views about disruptive behavior. In the teacher survey, 41 percent of elementary school teachers and 23 percent of high school teachers indicated that, on a typical day, student misbehavior disrupts their classes five times or more (not shown). Moreover, the recent trend in this regard is not positive. As we previously reported in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*, more than 40 percent of the teachers judge that student behavior has gotten worse during the past three years,

Classroom Behavior
Students' Responses in High- and Low-Rated Schools



35 percent say it has remained the same, and less than a quarter indicate change for the better.[19]

Here too, we looked at variation among elementary and high schools in student responses about classroom behavior. Among the bottom quarter of the elementary schools on ratings of classroom behavior, 55 percent of the students report *disruptive* or *very disruptive* experiences. In contrast, among the high-rated elementary schools, almost three-quarters of the students view their classrooms as at least *somewhat cooperative*. Among high schools, the percentages reporting *cooperative* or *somewhat cooperative* environments range from 52 percent in low-rated schools to 75 percent in high-rated schools. Clearly some schools are more successful in establishing norms that support classroom cooperation. However, it is worth noting that even in classrooms characterized as *somewhat cooperative*, students indicate that there are frequent disruptions.

On balance, it should be recognized that many classroom disruptions are caused by a wide range of factors that have nothing to do with student misbehavior. Classes are interrupted by schedule changes, fire drills, announcements, and staff and other visitors coming and leaving. Regardless of the source, such disruptions are not supportive of sustained instruction. These conditions, which appear to affect about half the eighth graders and a third of the tenth graders, divert significant amounts of classroom time from real learning.

These results offer a sober context as we consider the ambitious agenda for learning now called for by political leaders, educators, and the public. More focused, sustained classroom environments are needed if students are to develop higher order thinking and problem solving skills, as well as basic skills. To be sure, this is not to say that classrooms should be silent and regimented. Clearly, much learning involves talking and sharing ideas, learning to communicate with others, and working together on complex problems or projects. Such learning, however, does require a basic order, relatively free from disruption. Unfortunately, according to students' own reports, which are confirmed by teachers, there are many eighth- and tenth-grade classrooms in Chicago in which this does not happen.

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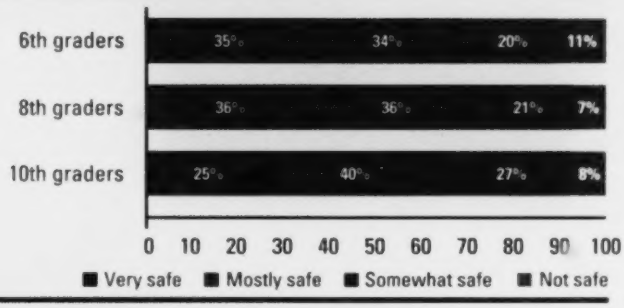
Safety

Creating a safe environment for children has been a major concern for Chicago Public Schools. This was one of the first problems that many Local School Councils (LSCs) chose to attack, using their new authority and resources under the 1988 School Reform Act. As we reported in 1993 in *A View from the Elementary Schools: The State of Reform in Chicago*, a large proportion of elementary school LSCs pursued improvements in this area, focusing considerable attention and directing resources toward this problem. These schools have worked to build positive ties with parents and the community as part of an overall strategy for safety improvement.[20]

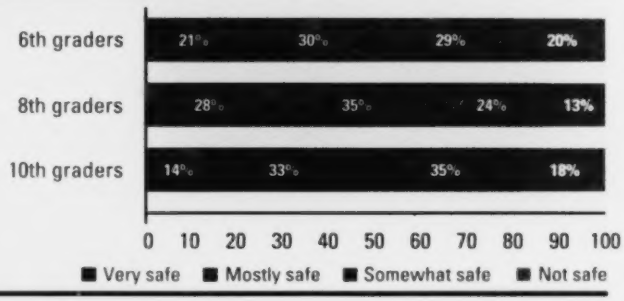
High schools also have expended considerable effort to address security. They have made use of discretionary funds to hire more security guards, and the school system has absorbed the cost of assigning one or two Chicago police officers to each of them. Fifty-nine out of 73 high schools now have metal detectors at the entrances and, increasingly, security procedures incorporate the use of random searches of students. Aside from these more obvious signs of security, high schools also have tried to heighten visibility of adults as well as public awareness, by using parental patrols and encouraging staff to concentrate on prevention of disruptive incidents.[21]

It is notable that arrests in the Chicago Public Schools have begun to decline. During the 1990-1991 school year, there were 6,251 arrests on school property for crimes ranging from murder and aggravated battery to gang intimidation and reckless conduct. During the 1993-1994 school year, the number of arrests dropped 18 percent to 5,128,

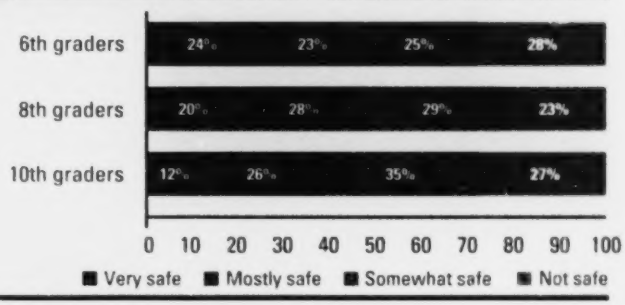
How safe do you feel in your classes?



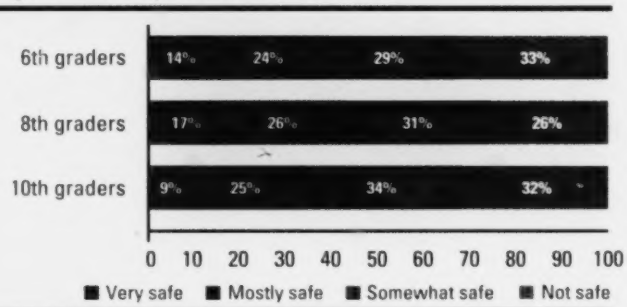
How safe do you feel in hallways and bathrooms?



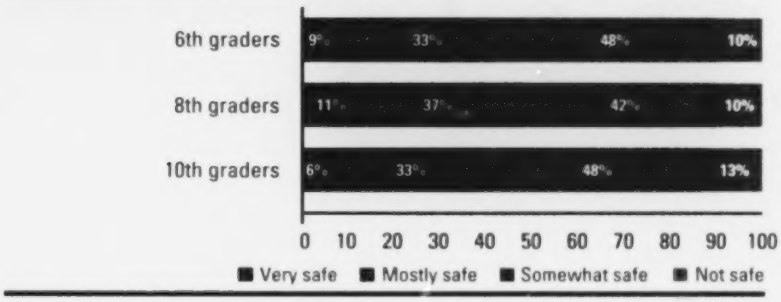
How safe do you feel traveling between home and school?



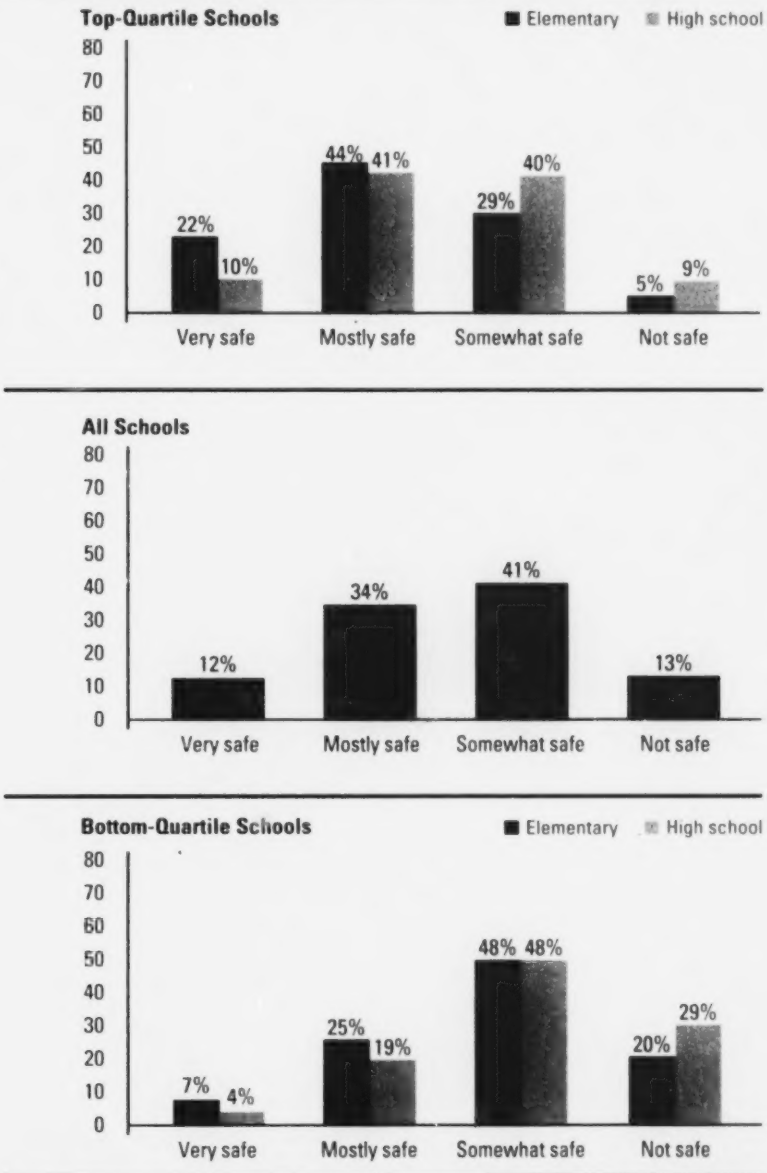
How safe do you feel outside around school?



Safety



Safety
Students' Responses in High- and Low-Rated Schools



despite the fact that more police (who could make arrests) were present.[22]

We note that Chicago is not alone in its quest for improved safety. A U.S. Justice Department study estimated, for example, that during a six-month period in 1989, 400,000 students, or 9 percent of the students aged 12 through 19, had been a victim of a crime in or around their school. Crimes included simple assaults, property crimes, and more serious crimes such as aggravated assault or robbery.[23] An Illinois survey determined that 8 percent of its high school students had been the victim of a physical attack at their school or while traveling to or from their school.[24] Students in the national survey also reported being fearful of attack—22 percent feared attack in school, and 15 percent were fearful as they traveled between home and school.[25]

The *Charting Reform* surveys permitted us to find out how Chicago students themselves judge school safety. We asked students a series of questions regarding their sense of safety and how often they experience threatening incidents.

In general, a student's sense of safety depends on where they are in the school. Students feel safest in the classroom. The majority of both elementary and high school students report feeling *very safe* or *mostly safe* in their classes. As they move out of the classrooms into the more public spaces of halls and bathrooms, however, the percentage of students indicating they feel *very safe* or *mostly safe* drops, with less than half the tenth graders rating these areas positively. When asked how safe they feel traveling between home and school, less than half the students in both elementary and high schools reported feeling *very* or *mostly safe*.

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Students feel most vulnerable when they are outside around the school. Only 38 percent of the sixth graders, 43 percent of the eighth graders and 34 percent of the tenth graders feel this is a *very safe* or *mostly safe* place to be; about a third of students in each of the three grades suggest that this area is only *somewhat safe*, and the rest claim it is *not safe*. Thus, about two-thirds of the students in all grades feel uneasy when they are outside around their school.

For the purpose of summarizing students' responses about safety, we created a scale based on these four questions. At one end of the scale are students who feel *very safe*. The students in this group report feeling very safe in classes, hallways and bathrooms and traveling between home and school, and mostly safe outside around the school. Only 9 percent of sixth graders, 11 percent of eighth graders and 6 percent of tenth graders register such confidence. About a third of each grade group can be classified as feeling *mostly safe*. These students feel very safe in their classes and mostly safe elsewhere. The largest group of students, almost 50 percent at each grade level, can be classified as feeling *somewhat safe*. These students portray their classrooms as mostly safe, but feel only somewhat safe elsewhere. Finally, between 10 percent and 13 percent of the students fall into the *not safe* category. These students feel somewhat safe in their classes but not safe in the halls and bathrooms, traveling between home and school, and being outside around the school. For this group of students, concerns about safety appear ever present.

Students' reports regarding safety varied from one school to another. Among elementary schools which students rate low on safety, only 32 percent of the students judge the school as a *very* or *mostly safe* place to be. This contrasts with top-rated schools, where 66 percent of the students provide such ratings. The safety rating among high schools varies somewhat less. Only a quarter of the students in low-rated high schools, as compared to about half the students in top-rated high schools, judge the overall environment as *very* or *mostly safe*.

In a briefing to the Consortium's Steering Committee on preliminary findings from the study, we were encouraged to consider the possible effects of neighborhood conditions on students' sense of safety in school. To examine these potential influences, we obtained 1994 crime statistics for the neighborhood immediately surrounding each elementary school.[26]

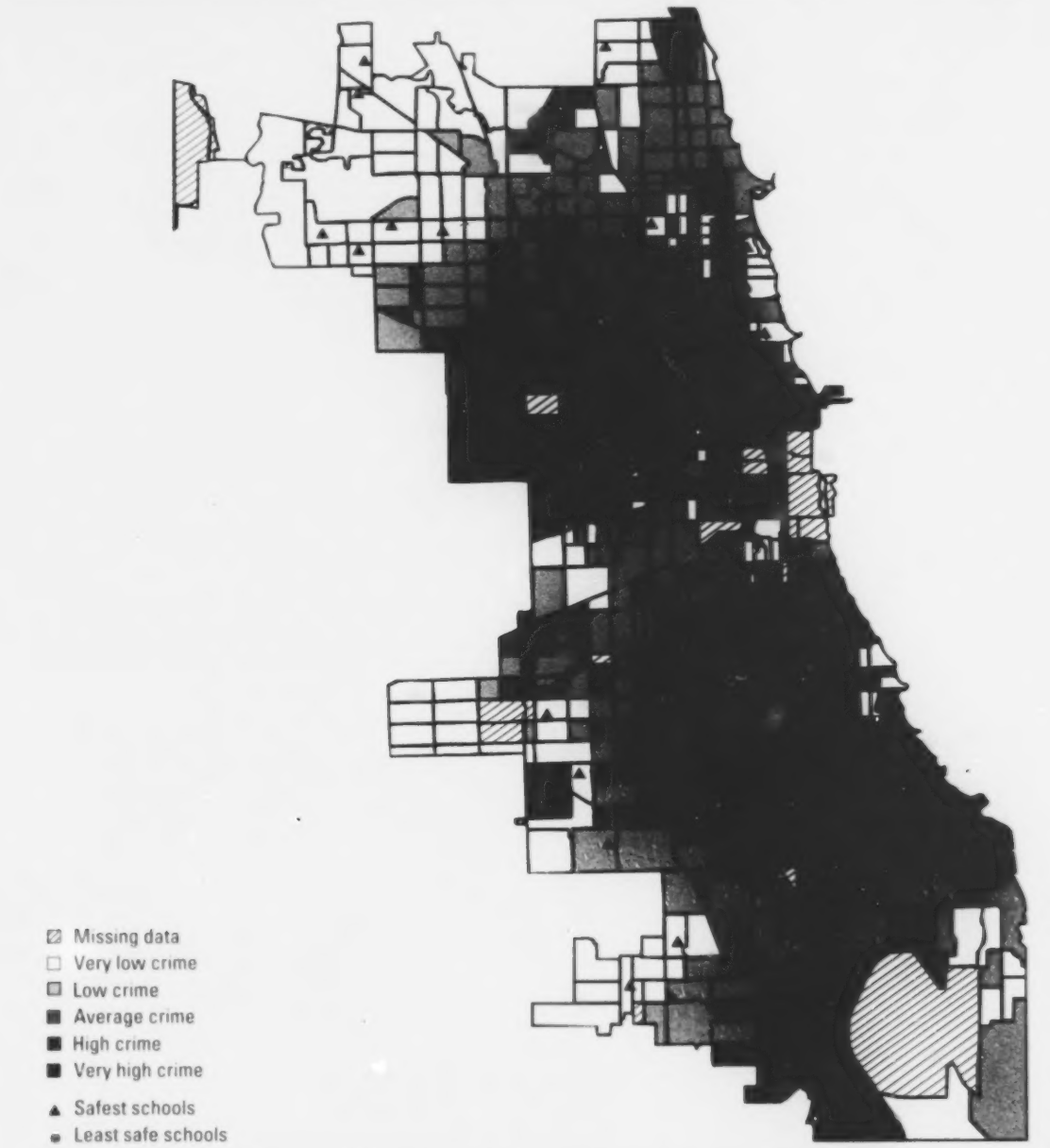
These statistics include the arrests rates for 10 different crimes, including robbery, assault, burglary, auto theft, theft, drugs, arson, illegal weapons, murder, and vice. In probing the influence of local crime on students' ratings of safety, we compared neighborhood crime statistics for the 30 elementary schools students rate as the safest to the 30 elementary schools students rate the least safe.[27]

The differences between safest and least safe elementary schools are dramatic and show enormous variation in the incidence of crime from one neighborhood to another. For example, in the neighborhoods surrounding the safest schools, there were 4.6 robberies per thousand residents, compared to 27.2 robberies per thousand people in neighborhoods around the least safe schools. The statistics for assault are also striking; 21.9 per thousand around the safest schools versus 95.9 per thousand around the least safe schools. For drug arrests, the incidence ranged from 2.5 per thousand people around the safest schools to 49.8 per thousand around the least safe schools. In other words, there are 20 times as many drug arrests around the least safe schools than

Crime Rates in Neighborhoods around Elementary Schools (Incidents per 1,000 People)

	30 Safest Schools	30 Least Safe Schools
Robbery	4.6	27.2
Assault	21.9	95.9
Burglary	10.8	21.8
Auto theft	9.51	9.0
Theft	33.8	49.4
Drugs	2.5	49.8
Arson	17.8	38.9
Weapons	0.9	9.4
Murder	0.0	0.7
Vice	1.4	5.8

School Safety and Neighborhood Crime Rate



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around the safest schools!

These results lend substantial credibility to students' reports about school safety. Sixth and eighth graders who indicate a higher level of overall safety attend schools in safe neighborhoods. These results also suggest that neighborhood conditions may have an important influence on school safety. While educators and parents can, and often do, make considerable efforts to create a safe haven in the school, neighborhood conditions, which are much harder to control, also affect students' sense of safety.

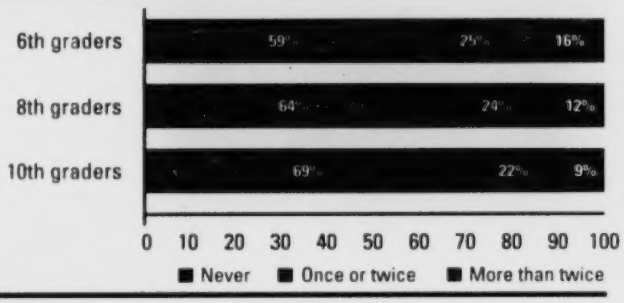
To illustrate these findings, we located schools on a Chicago map that has been shaded to reflect the crime rate in each census tract (previous page).[29] The map reveals that the schools rated the safest tend to be located in lower-crime areas. Similarly, least safe schools generally are surrounded by high-crime neighborhoods.

We also investigated whether neighborhood conditions have a greater impact on students' responses to the question about safety outside around the school than on responses to questions regarding areas inside the school. For this purpose, we separated students' safety reports into two components: how safe they feel outside around the school and how safe they feel in classes, hallways, and bathrooms. (The item regarding travel to and from school was not used in this analysis.) Contrary to our initial expectations, the patterns of student responses about in-school and out-of-school safety are fairly similar. Both have strong relationships to the incidence of neighborhood crime.[30]

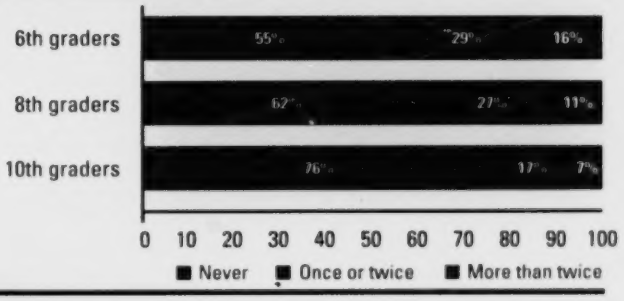
It is understandable that students feel less safe outside around a school in a high-crime neighborhood. It is compelling, however, that students'

Threatening Incidents at School

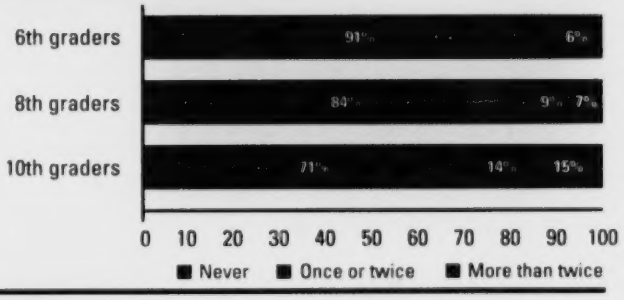
How often this school year have you been threatened by another student in school?



How often this school year have you been in a fist fight in school?



How often this school year have you been offered drugs in school?



In any discussion about student safety, it is important to recognize that a majority of students do not personally experience threatening incidents at school. Fifty-nine to 69 percent of students in the sixth, eighth, and tenth grades were never threatened by another student in the past school year; 55 to 76 percent were never in a fist fight; and 71 to 91 percent were never offered drugs. This offers some evidence to counter the stereotype of inner-city schools as highly dangerous places.

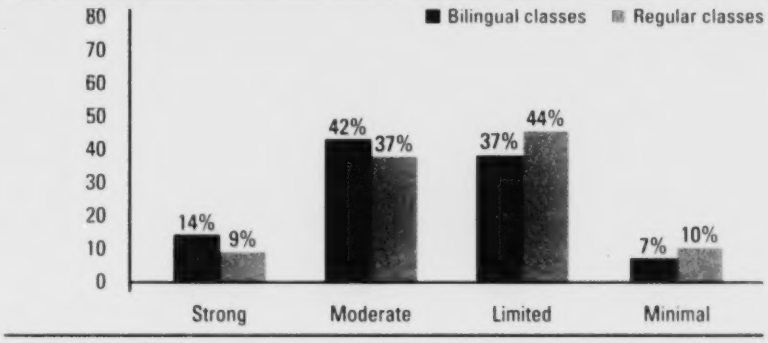
It is also worth noting that a smaller percentage of high school students than elementary students report threats from other students and being in fist fights. This is consistent with findings of the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988.[28] The age trend is just the opposite for being offered drugs. As students grow older, the chance they will be offered drugs in school rises.

views of safety inside the school are also related to these neighborhood conditions. Thus, students' sense of safety at school—even in the classroom—appears to depend on the broader social conditions of the community in which the school is located.

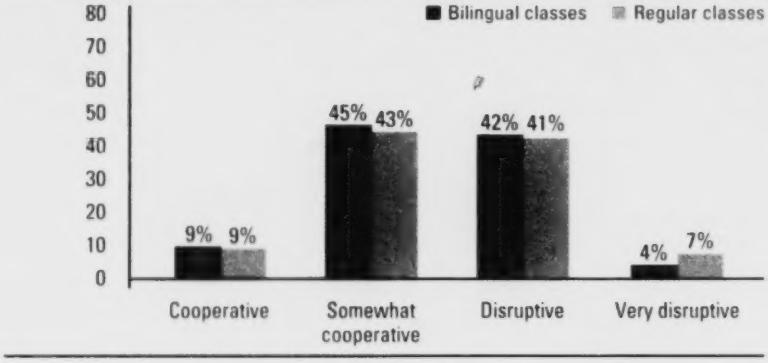
On balance, while our data suggest that community characteristics affect students' sense of safety, these same data also indicate that the school can make a difference in this regard. In an attempt to identify the characteristics of schools with better safety ratings than one might expect, given their school community demographics, we carried out one additional analysis.[31] It took into account the student composition in each school, pre-reform achievement levels, as well as school community crime rates.

We found that cooperative effort among teachers, parents, the principal, and LSC members, which we identified in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*, really matters. Students feel safer in school communities when adults are working constructively together on improvement efforts. These results add further to the general findings offered in this section. Safety is a school community problem that cannot be solved without the sustained engagement of adults, both inside and outside the schools.

Peer Support for Academic Work
Hispanic Sixth- and Eighth-Grade Students



Classroom Behavior
Hispanic Sixth- and Eighth-Grade Students



HOW DIFFERENT KINDS OF STUDENTS EXPERIENCE CHICAGO SCHOOLS

For this purpose, we investigated a variety of student characteristics, including race/ethnicity, gender, the education and employment level of the family, and whether the family was below the poverty threshold.[32] We also examined whether differences arise for students who are bused and for students in bilingual education classes. Generally, few clear patterns emerge. This means that the varied experiences reported above are distributed relatively evenly among the diverse student populations served by the CPS.

A couple of general patterns do appear, however. First, girls generally report experiencing school in somewhat more positive ways than boys do. By a small margin, they tend to view student behavior as more cooperative, and they report that more of their friends try hard in school. Seven percent more girls than boys rate their teachers highly on personalism, and 9 percent more girls provide the highest rating on academic press. This pattern occurs for both elementary and high school students (not shown).

Secondly, we found that students in elementary bilingual education offer somewhat different views of the school climate than other students.[33] Since the majority of bilingual students are Hispanic, we specifically investigated the differences within this ethnic group.[34] Hispanic bilingual education students report significantly higher levels of peer support for academic work and slightly more classroom cooperation than students in regular classes. They also offer somewhat more positive ratings about teachers' personal interest in them, but this is counterbalanced by substantially lower levels of academic press in bilingual classes. (No differences were found with re-

spect to safety.) Comparable results also occur for high school students (not shown).

HOW SCHOOLS VARY IN TERMS OF THEIR LEARNING CLIMATE

Under a decentralization initiative, such as the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988, we expect variability among schools in how they use the resources and authority devolved to them. As previous Consortium studies have documented, some schools have seriously embraced reform; others have not. Given this variation among schools, we would also expect to find differences in their learning climates if "reform is working." To investigate this, we developed for each of the five elements of a student-centered learning climate a summary indicator for each school, based on averaging the responses for all students in each school on each scale. In some schools, most students are positive, producing a high value for a particular school indicator; in other schools, many students are negative, yielding a low school value. The box plots display the relative frequency of positive and negative school reports.

Differences among Elementary Schools

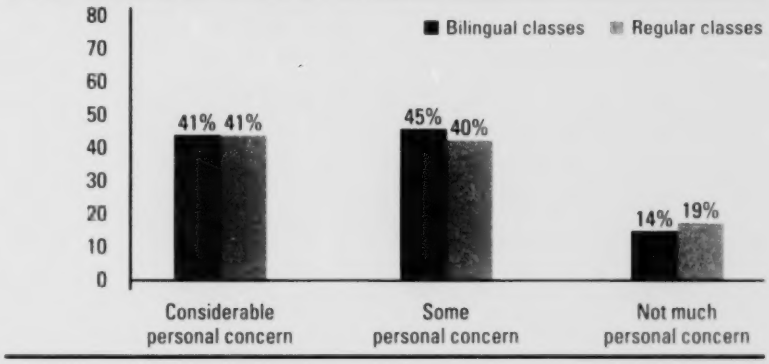
We investigated a variety of factors that distinguish among elementary schools, such as percentage of low income students,[35] the racial composition of the student body, the level of education and employment in the neighborhood surrounding the school, and the stability of the student population. We also considered the effects of school size and overall pre-reform levels of student achievement. The only factors for which consistent differences emerged were racial/ethnic composition and school size.

Racial and ethnic composition of the school. Schools serving different racial and ethnic populations are fairly similar on the first four school indicators. Within the African-American schools, however, there is considerable variation on personalism and academic press, as is evidenced by the length of the "whiskers" in the box plot. Some of both the highest- and lowest-rated schools in the CPS on these two indicators are predominantly African-American. (We take a closer look at these schools later in this section).

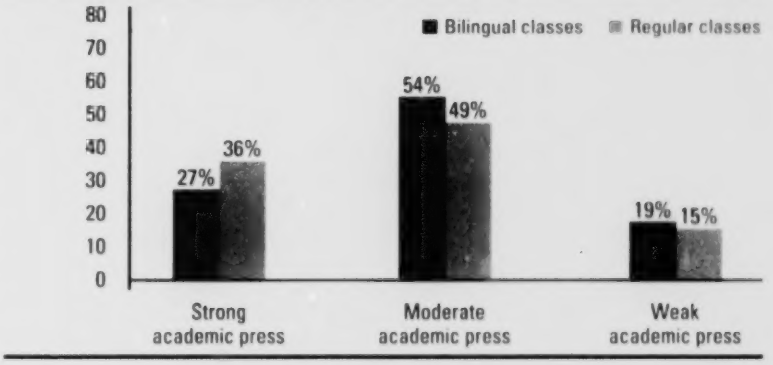
The biggest differences by racial and ethnic composition occurred for student safety reports. Students in African-American schools give their schools the lowest ratings, and students in integrated schools give the highest. There is great variation among the mixed minority schools: Notice that the top whisker reaches into the same area as the integrated schools. Thus, some mixed minority schools are rated just as high on safety as integrated schools, and others receive ratings comparable to the lowest-rated African-American schools.

We reported in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock* that a critical aspect of teachers' work environment was the presence of racial/ethnic tensions within a faculty. Such tensions were more salient for teach-

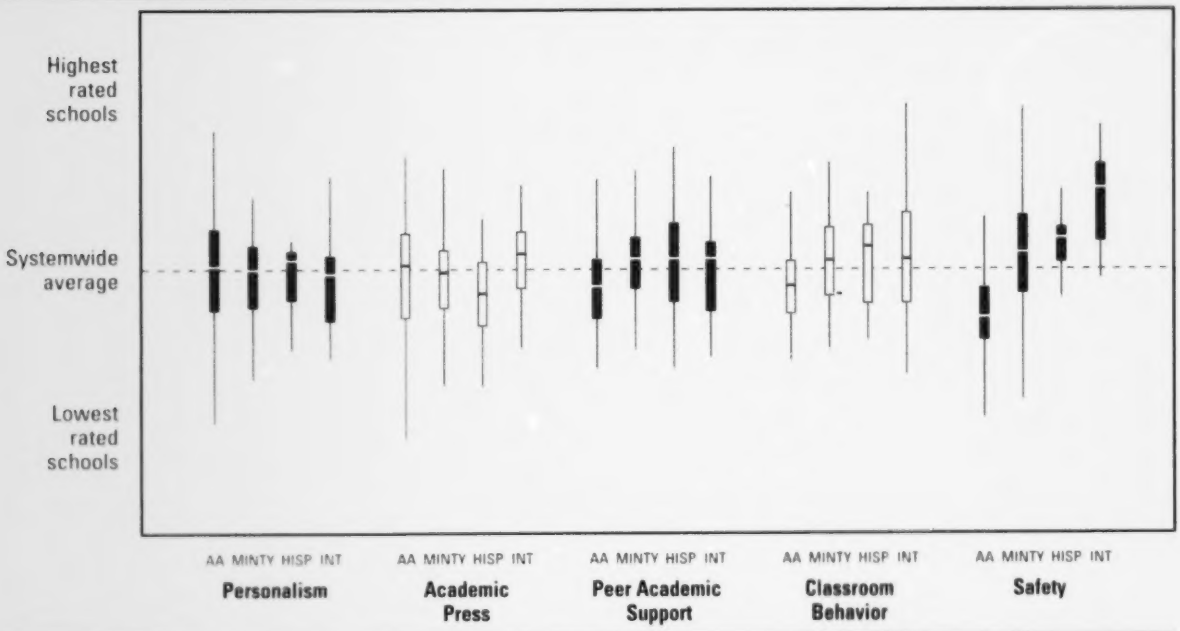
Personalism
Hispanic Sixth- and Eighth-Grade Students



Press toward Academic Work
Hispanic Sixth- and Eighth-Grade Students



Student-Centered Learning Climate
Distribution of School Indicators: Elementary Schools

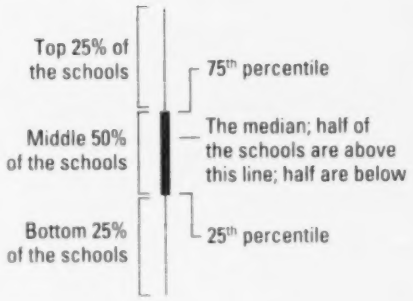


AA—Schools where more than 85% of the students are African-American **MINTY**—Schools where 70% or more of the students are mixed-minority groups **HISP**—Schools where more than 85% of the students are Hispanic **INT**—Schools where more than 30% of the students are white. In the CPS, 47 percent of the elementary schools are predominantly African-American; 26 percent are mixed minority; 9 percent are predominantly Hispanic; and 18 percent are integrated.

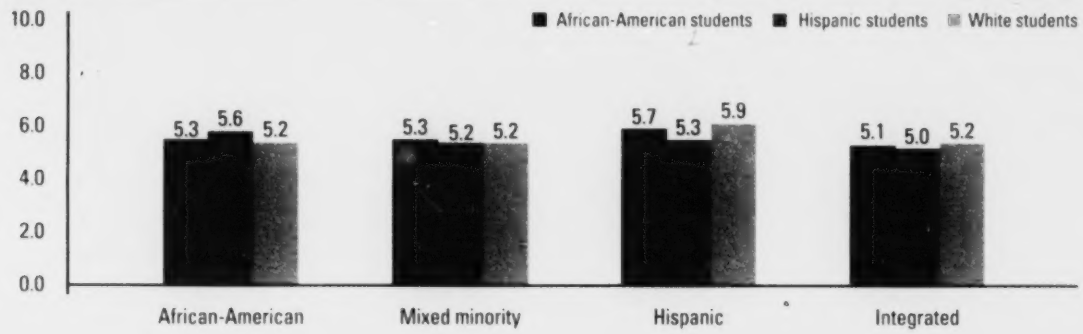
Note: These box plots permit comparison of schools that differ with respect to the racial composition of the student body. For each measure, four plots are shown, each representing schools with a different racial make-up.

How to Read a Box Plot and Why We Use Them

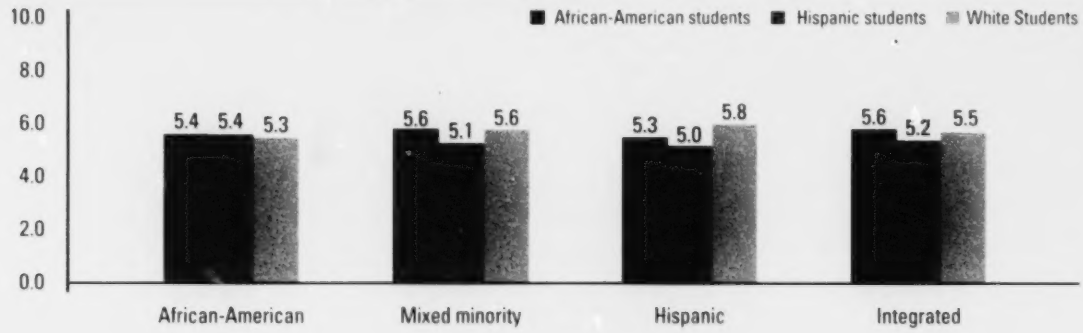
The box plot details the relative frequency of positive and negative school reports. Each box encloses the middle 50 percent of the schools. The lines, called "whiskers," extending up and down from the box, show the range of scores for the top and bottom quartile schools. These are the highest and lowest performing schools on each particular scale. Within each profile, the scales are centered on the systemwide average for the schools that participated in the survey.


Top 25% of the schools
75th percentile
Middle 50% of the schools
The median; half of the schools are above this line; half are below
Bottom 25% of the schools
25th percentile

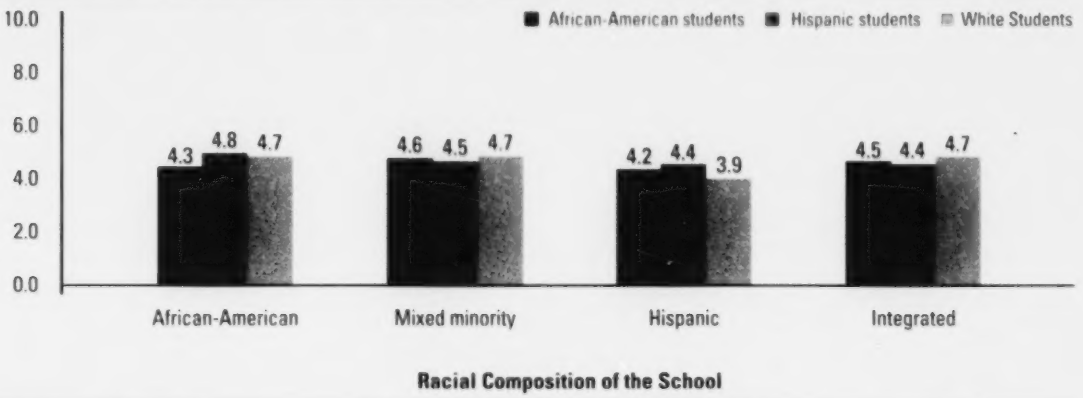
Personalism by Student's Race/Ethnicity and School Racial Composition Elementary Schools



Press toward Academic Achievement by Student's Race/Ethnicity and School Racial Composition Elementary Schools

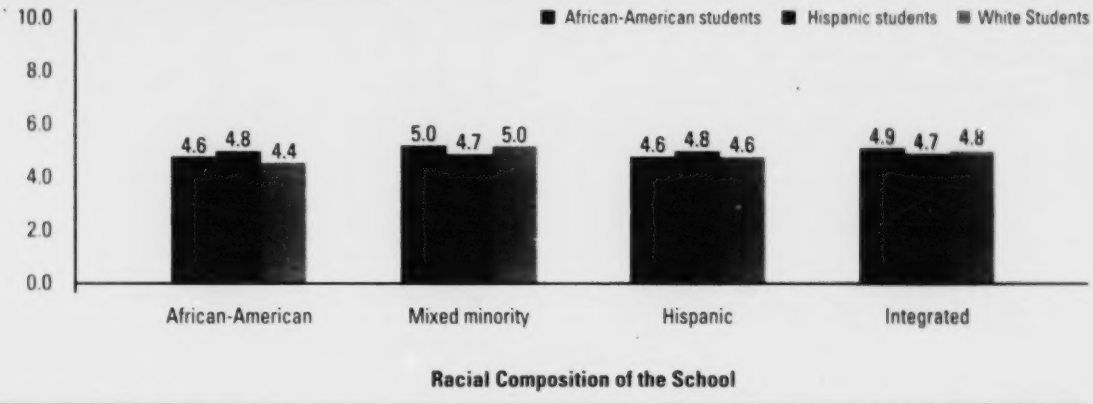


Peer Support for Academic Work by Student's Race/Ethnicity and School Racial Composition Elementary Schools

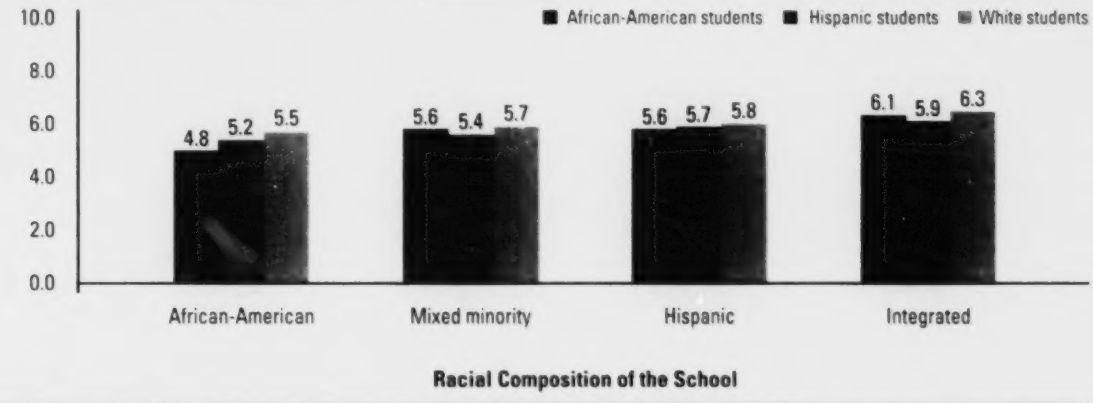


Note: All the scales constructed for this graph were placed on a 0 to 10 point scale.

Classroom Behavior by Student's Race/Ethnicity and School Racial Composition Elementary Schools



Safety by Student's Race/Ethnicity and School Racial Composition Elementary Schools



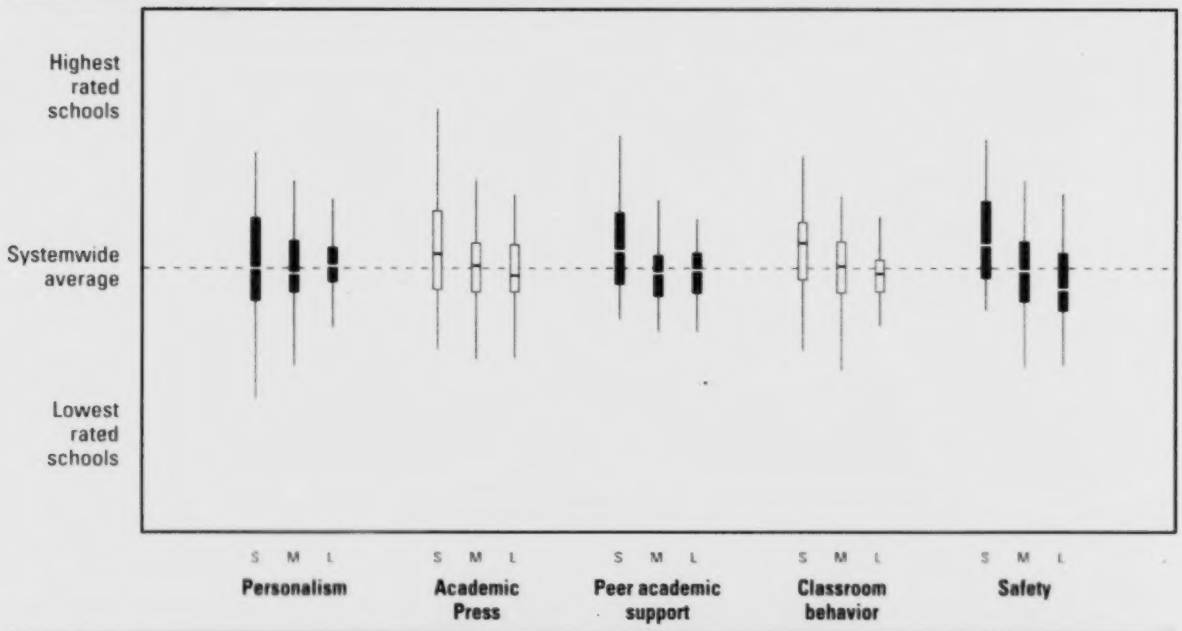
Note: All the scales constructed for this graph were placed on a 0 to 10 point scale.

ers who were in the minority within their school with respect to racial and ethnic composition of the faculty. This suggested that we examine students' ratings of various aspects of the learning climate to see whether students who are in the minority within a school offer different reports about the learning climate than majority students do. Do Hispanic students, in primarily African-American schools for example, see their schools differently than their African-American classmates do? To examine this question, we compared reports from students of different racial and ethnic groups within each of the five different racial/ethnic types of schools.

For the most part, the results show little tendency for minority students within a school to rate the learning climate lower. Average differences among groups of students are generally small. With respect to personalism, press toward academic achievement, peer support for academic work, classroom behavior, and safety, minority and majority groups within each type of school offer similar ratings. For example, African-American students in predominantly African-American schools provide ratings about personalism which are generally comparable to those offered by Hispanic and white students in the same schools.

In sum, there is little evidence that students who are in the minority in their school are less comfortable about the learning climate than students who are in the majority. Racial differences inside a school do not appear to make a difference in the way students describe their relation-

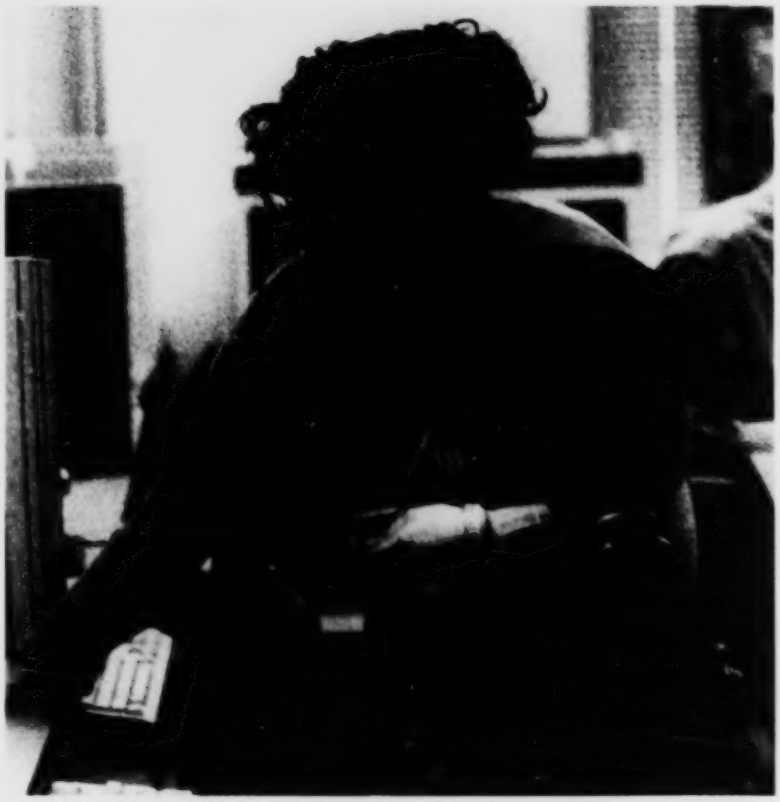
Student-Centered Learning Climate
Distribution of School Indicators: Elementary Schools



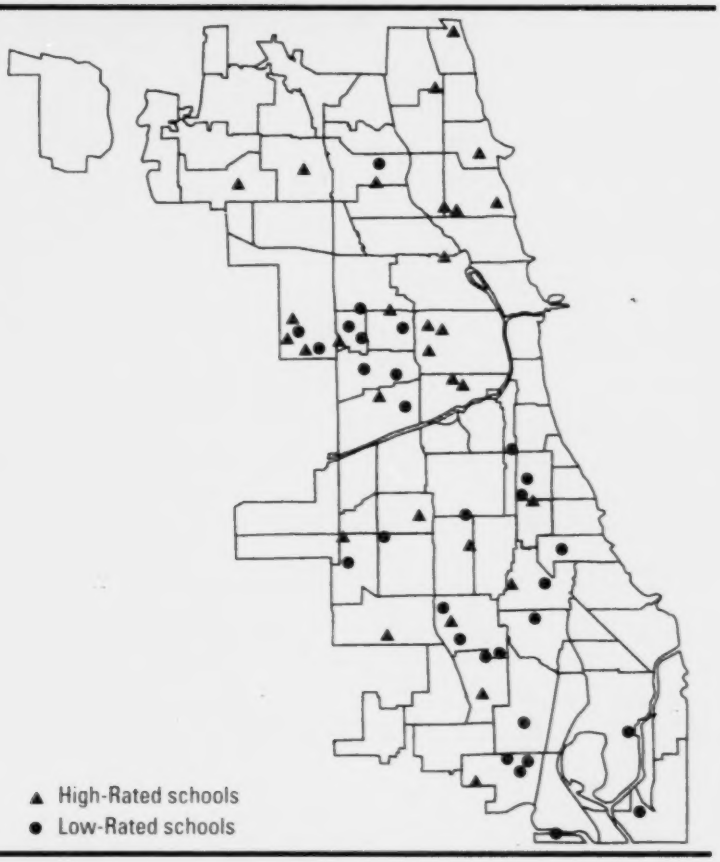
S Small schools (350 and under) **M** Medium-sized schools (351 to 700) **L** Large schools (over 700)

ships with teachers, other students' behavior, their friends' commitment to school, or safety.

School size. The advantage of small schools has been a stable finding across the *Charting Reform* series of reports. A positive small-school effect also appears in students' reports about learning climate. In general, students in small elementary schools offer more positive ratings than students in medium and large elementary schools. This occurs for all school climate indicators except teacher personalism. The biggest differences were observed for school safety. Although one must always be cautious in making policy inferences from data of this sort, these results are certainly supportive of the CPS's current priority to promote the development of more small schools. At a minimum, we know that a positive,



Low- and High-Rated Schools on Student-Centered Learning Climate



student-centered learning climate is more prevalent among the existing small schools.

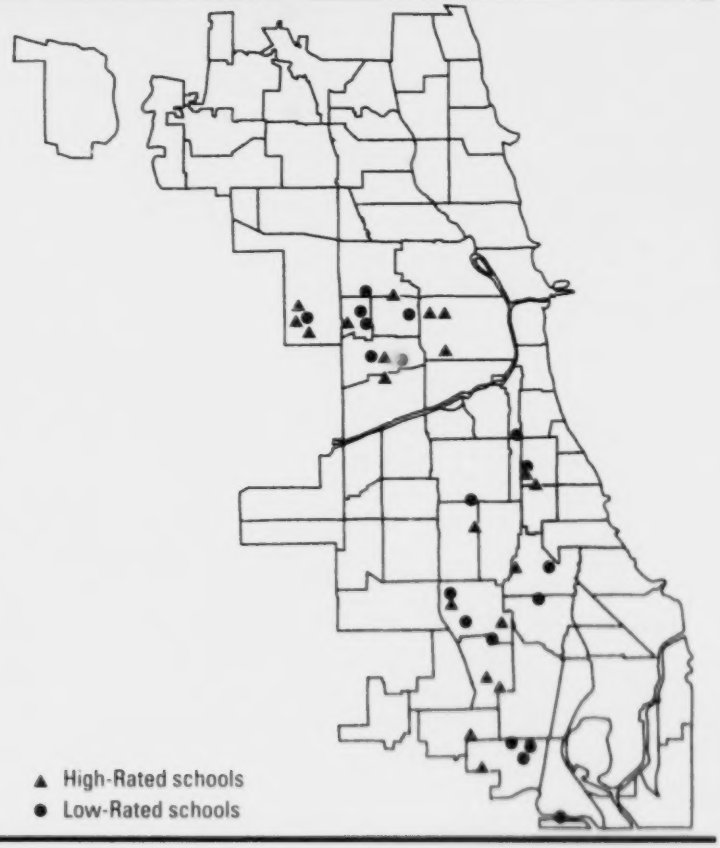
A deeper analysis of school and community effects. The analyses above indicate that differences among schools in the basic characteristics of their students do not account for much of the variation in their learning climates. What then does? To investigate this further, we created a composite indicator of all five scales and carried out extensive statistical analyses to examine how various school and community factors might contribute overall to a positive learning environment.[36] As in our previous reports,[37] we focused on the elementary schools that are clearly in need of improvement—where average achievement prior to reform was below national norms. Eighty-five percent of Chicago elementary schools fall into this category. The 1994 student survey includes data from 202 of these schools.

We compared the characteristics of the 30 schools receiving the highest ratings from students with the 30 schools receiving the lowest ratings.[38] As expected from the results above, schools rated highly tend to be located in more advantaged neighborhoods and to have somewhat higher average test scores prior to reform. There also are more small schools and fewer African-American schools in the top 30 than in the bottom 30.

We have plotted the approximate geographic locations of the top and bottom 30 schools. The highest-rated schools are broadly spread around the city. In this sense, positive experiences with respect to learning climate are quite equitably distributed. The clumping of low-rated schools on the West side and south-central area follows the basic racial composition pattern mentioned before. Even so, it is important to note that there are numerous occasions where a low-rated school sits near a high-rated school. In these instances, such pairs of schools appear indistinguishable in terms of basic school and community socioeconomic characteristics. Yet students inside them report very different experiences with respect to the learning climate.

In answer to our question "What, then, does matter?" we found that the top and bottom-ranked schools differ considerably with respect to the level of cooperative adult effort in the school community. (This school indicator summarizes teachers' reports of effective leadership by the LSC and the principal, the participation of parents in the school, and positive professional beliefs and practices among teachers.)[39] Our data indicate a much higher level of cooperative adult effort in the top 30 schools than in the bottom 30 schools. These results establish a very important connection: A student-centered learning climate is more likely in schools where there are broad-based efforts by adults to improve the school. Put simply, cooperative efforts among parents, community members, and school professionals result in better experiences for students.

Low- and High-Rated African-American Schools on Student-Centered Learning Climate



We also looked at this in the opposite way. That is, we examined how students rated the learning climate of schools which teachers rated high and low on cooperative adult effort. Fifty-three percent of the schools that students rated highly on student-centered learning climate were also in the top quartile on teachers' ratings of cooperative adult effort (not shown). Only 10 percent of the schools which students rated poorly were in the top quartile on the teachers' ratings. Thus, evidence from students and teachers has converged. Both groups tend to identify the same set of schools as having positive environments for learning and teaching.

In sum, our statistical results suggest that students are more likely to experience a positive learning climate when adults are working cooperatively. This finding tends to confirm a key premise of the 1988 Chicago School Reform Act—urban school improvement entails strengthening the ties between local school professionals and the parents and communities they serve.

A closer look at variability within African-American schools. Before concluding this section of the report, we return briefly to the issue of what accounts for the wide range of responses among African-American schools on indicators of student-centered learning climate. In order to understand this better, we carried out analyses similar to those just described above. We illustrate our findings by comparing the top and bottom 20 African-American schools on the composite indicator of student-centered learning climate.

We found virtually no differences between top and bottom African-American schools with respect to the demographic characteristics of the neighborhoods where the schools are located or the neighborhoods where the children live. (Based on census data, we examined such factors as the concentration of poverty, employment and income, and length of time people own homes or rent.) We also took into account the stability of the student enrollment at the school, low income percentage, and pre-reform achievement level. None of these factors explain much of the variability among African-American schools.

A map locating the highest- and lowest-rated African-American schools underscores the lack of influence of demographic and community characteristics in explaining differences between these two groups of schools. Again, there are numerous instances where high- and low-rated schools sit adjacent to each other.

We did find, however, as was the case above, that the most important factor distinguishing top and bottom African-American schools is the level of cooperative adult effort reported by the teachers. This finding further supports our general conclusion: Positive school climate is less a matter of community characteristics and much more dependent on how adults in the school community relate to

one another. In schools where there is an active LSC, a strong and facilitative principal, parent involvement, and teachers working together on instructional improvement, children and youth benefit. In such schools, students give more positive reports of teachers' academic expectations and personal support for students, their friends' efforts, behavior of classmates, and safety.

Differences among High Schools

With respect to high schools, we again searched for schools that may have more positive learning climates than one would expect, given the characteristics of the student body. While a few individual schools consistently turned up positively in our analyses, we could not determine any systematic explanations from the data we collected. Original field work, well beyond the scope of this study, would be required to find out more about what actually occurs in these schools.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

As we look across the whole ensemble of students' responses, we see relatively large percentages of sixth-, eighth-, and tenth-grade students expressing uneasiness about safety. Equally important, many students are not surrounded by friends who are hard working and committed to learning. These results suggest that distractions from academic achievement are commonplace in many Chicago schools. Considering the exhortations heard almost daily from educators, politicians, journalists, and the public for higher standards and more rigorous instruction, it is difficult to imagine that much progress can be made toward these ends without schools, families, and communities acting in concert to improve safety and develop a stronger ethic regarding learning and achievement.

On a more optimistic note, the majority of students have not experienced a single threatening event during the school year. In addition, most students are quite positive in their views of teachers and generally view them as caring about them and wanting them to succeed. Many students also receive clear messages from their teachers that academic work is important.

One of the most important findings is that students' reports of the learning climate become more negative as we move across sixth, eighth, and tenth grades. High school students generally provide quite negative assessments about the learning climate in their schools. Similarly, as reported in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*, high school teachers offer very negative reports about school leadership, parent involvement, and professional community and orientation. Thus, students and teachers provide evidence that underscores the serious and deep problems in many Chicago high schools, a situation which we characterized as widespread institutional failure in our earlier report.[40]

Teachers, principals, and parents, however, can take heart. Our findings also indicate their efforts can pay off for students. When adults work together to develop strong leadership and governance and involve parents in the school, and when teachers collaborate, learn, and work together to improve instruction, good things are likely to happen for students. One example of a school where many adults have worked simultaneously to address a myriad of problems is Esperanza Elementary School (a pseudonym). This school illustrates the direct benefit to children of such improvement efforts. Esperanza is a place where parents want to send their children.

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Esperanza Elementary School: Cultivating a Student-Centered Climate

It's something you don't expect to see at a Chicago public school—a janitor on a third floor ledge hand cleaning the windows. But it happens at Esperanza Elementary School, a school that takes its environment and climate very seriously.

Five years ago Esperanza was an overcrowded school in an impoverished neighborhood troubled by run-down properties, littered streets and gang graffiti. Now, Esperanza is a haven of order and pride, a school working with community leaders and parents to nurture these same qualities in the neighborhood.

The feel and appearance of Esperanza are the first signs of its commitment to a respectful and caring climate. Esperanza's building and grounds are beautifully maintained. Children, parents, and visitors are warmly greeted at the reception desk. Bright banners hang from the ceilings and hallways are adorned with displays of student work. Each classroom is a unique and colorful expression of the work of its teachers and students. Alongside displays of students' work are posters stating school rules that are well enforced. There are norms for walking and behaving in hallways that all students and staff follow. When students misbehave, they are immediately referred to a discipline program that is staffed full-time and stresses parent involvement, counseling, and recognition for improvement. A visit with the principal, who is very visible in the school, is also part of the discipline process. Esperanza also uses student adoption, buddy systems, and awards programs to enhance student support, cultivate behavior standards, and build school community.

Because so much at Esperanza is as it should be, it is easy to overlook the extraordinary work and tenacity behind it all. The school's environment and climate reflect numerous and determined efforts that began in 1989 when the first LSC was elected and a new principal was hired. Repairing poor relations between the school and its largely Latino community was a first step. Parents and community members were encouraged to visit the school to get to know it better, and to see it as a place for addressing community issues and concerns. Next, the LSC and the administration pledged to reduce the severe overcrowding that plagued the school. Explained Esperanza's principal: "For years and years this was an overcrowded school and an overcrowded school is a failing school. You have to change that." Esperanza's administration battled unrelentingly for five years to control enrollments, to install portable classrooms, and to lobby for new school construction in the area. While reducing the number of children in the building, Esperanza also worked to increase the number of adults. The release of Chapter 1 monies has allowed the school to enhance not only curriculum and instructional supports, but security services, social work staff, and support staff. All of these enhancements have, in turn, helped the school recruit and maintain a dedicated group of parent and community volunteers, because Esperanza is now a pleasant and resourceful organization.

Students were not the only members of Esperanza School that received strong messages about high expectations and standards. Professional and non-professional staff members who were not performing or improving or who were insensitive or impatient with students, were put on notice; some staff left, some were "counseled out," and a few were taken all the way through dismissal hearings. More than a quarter of the staff at Esperanza has retired or left since the reform laws took effect, and the principal has used new hiring procedures to employ teachers committed to a school environment that stresses respect and success. Esperanza's LSC has involved parents in the development of school climate by participating in an Alliance for Achievement program that sponsors parent conversations in neighborhood homes about educational issues.

Strong improvements in the basic school climate have, in recent years, allowed the staff to turn more of their talents and energies to the academic programs of the school. Teachers are developing performance standards and assessments that make expectations for learning clearer and provide more individualized feedback on student progress. Inculcating high expectations and standards for academic work is also a challenge at Esperanza. All of Esperanza's students come from low-income families and many do not experience the help and modeling that supports success in school. More than half of surveyed students at Esperanza report that their friends do not take school seriously or work hard to do well. Trying to provide the motivation and care their students need can be a daunting task for Esperanza's teachers, but many are working to optimize their efforts by piloting well planned and carefully imple-

mented K-8 mini-schools that emphasize tightly coordinated instruction, greater student guidance, and monitoring across years. All of these activities and commitments are encouraging teachers to think more collectively about their goals and to work together.

For Esperanza's students, who come to school on Fridays in their school pride T-shirts, school is a safe place to learn and grow and feel good about themselves. It's still a little crowded, and getting engaged in school work is still difficult. But the messages students receive are clear—attending school and doing school work are important, and so are they.

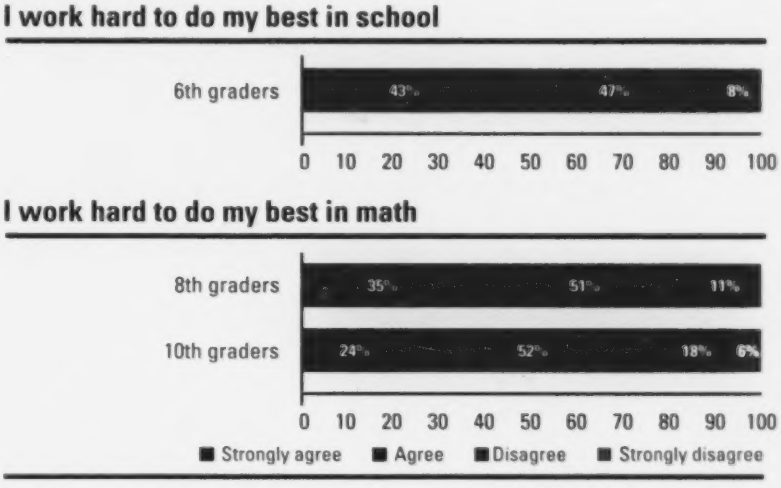
Section II

Academic Engagement and School Participation

By Penny Bender Sebring and Anthony S. Bryk

Academic achievement depends on students' active engagement with the school and its academic mission. Students who come to class on time, come prepared, actively participate, do their homework, and are involved in extracurricular activities perform well on achievement tests. This is true for all kinds of students—different ethnic and racial groups, boys and girls, and students from families of varying income levels.[1] Lasting and deep learning develops through sustained student work. Yet low levels of engagement are evident in schools throughout the United States, particularly in high schools.[2]

Clearly, families contribute to students' engagement by supporting and encouraging their children, and students have a responsibility for applying themselves. At the same time, however, schools and teachers must create the conditions and educational programs that inspire students to commit effort to learning. To explore the engagement of Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) students, we asked them a number of questions about their attitudes and interest in school work and about specific behaviors, such as doing homework, cutting class, and participating in extracurricular activities. We also examined administrative records on student absenteeism.



STUDENTS' REPORTS ABOUT THEIR OWN ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

When asked whether they are working hard to do their best, the vast majority of students say "yes." Ninety percent of sixth graders *agree* or *strongly agree* with this statement. Among eighth and tenth graders, 86 percent and 76 percent respectively claim they are doing their best in math class.[3] Comparable responses also are given by eighth and tenth graders for other core subjects—language arts/English, science, and social studies.

This high level of self-reported academic engagement falls off a bit when we ask about students' interest in subject matter. About 70 percent of eighth graders, and 60 percent of tenth graders claim that they find their math topics interesting and challenging (next page). Similar percentages of students express interest in the other three core subjects. (The sixth grade survey did not contain this question.)

The percentage of positive responses slips a bit further when we look at students' affective responses to learning. Across grades six, eight, and ten, almost half the students report that they are usually or often bored in class. (Again, responses of eighth- and tenth-grade students are fairly comparable for other subjects.)

Hence, students almost unanimously reply that they "work hard," but they offer more mixed responses about their interest in academic topics—whether they look forward to

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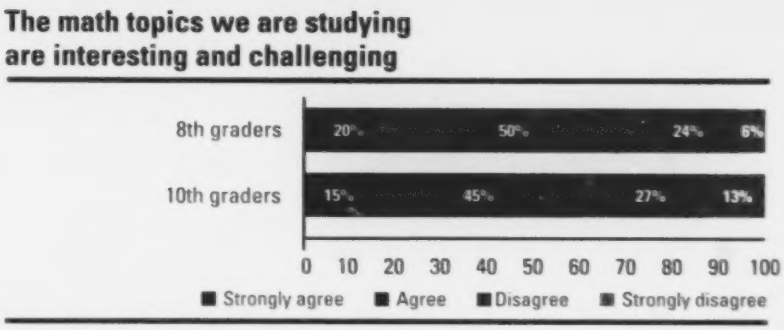
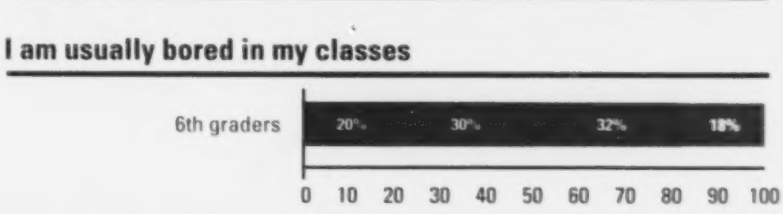
class and whether they feel bored. In short, they feel they are working hard but may not find their classes particularly engaging.

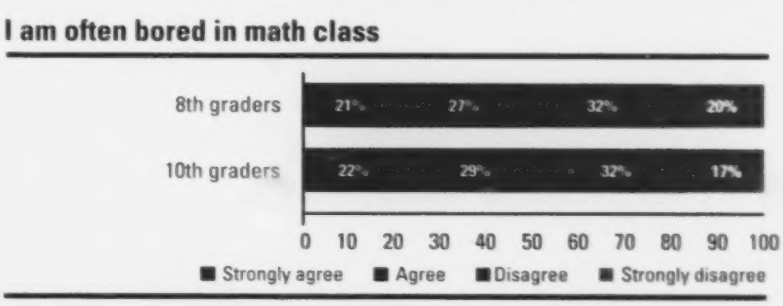
We combined the survey items discussed above with a question about whether students complete their homework to form a scale on academic engagement which summarizes students' responses on all these items. About half the sixth and eighth graders report *moderate* to *high* engagement. Students in these two categories generally say they work hard to do their best, complete their homework most of the time, find the topics covered in class interesting, and are not bored in class. Responses for the other half of the students reflect *limited* or *minimal* engagement. These students report that they work hard to do their best, but even so, they do not always do their homework. They also tend to report that class (or school) is boring, and that they are not very interested in topics they are studying.

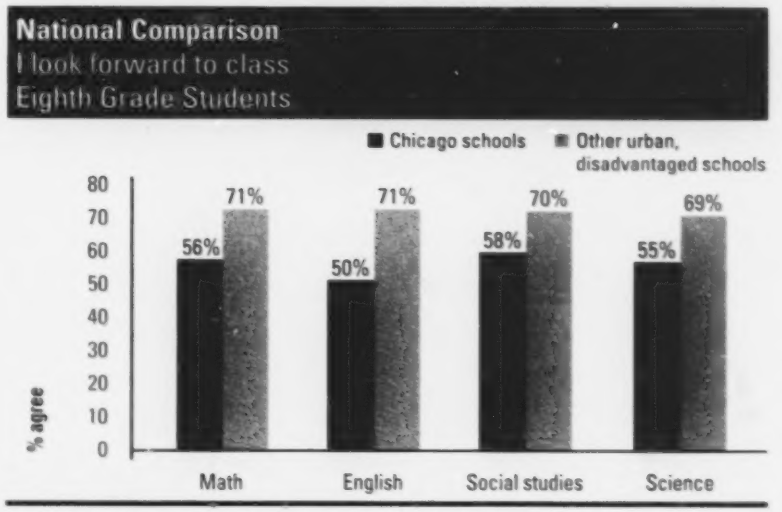
As is true for the individual questions, the overall scale responses on student engagement decline some in high school. The percentage of disengaged students (classified as *minimal* in the scale) rises from less than 5 percent in sixth grade to almost 25 percent in tenth grade. Moreover, in interpreting this, it is important to remember that by spring of tenth grade, a substantial number of academically weak students have already dropped out of high school and, as a result, are not included in these survey responses (see Section III).

As in Section I, we present bar graphs comparing students' responses in schools where average engagement scores are high to responses of students in schools where average engagement scores are low. Among low-rated elementary schools, 47 percent of the sixth and eighth graders register *high* or *mod-*





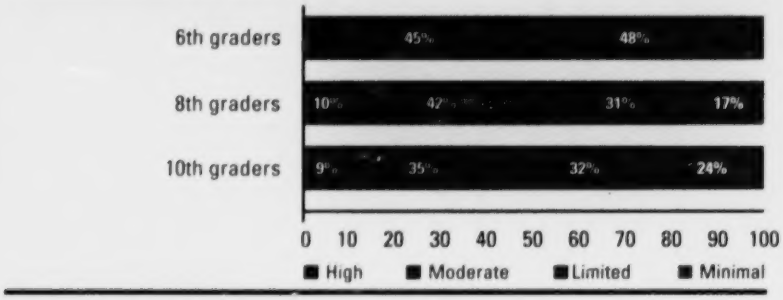




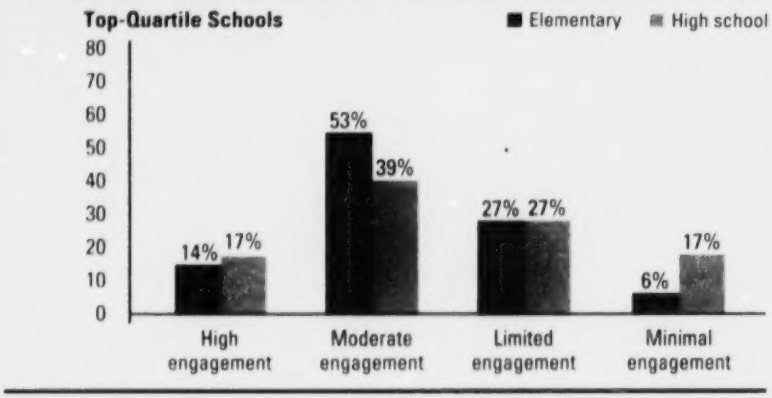
Source for other urban, disadvantaged schools: *National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988.*

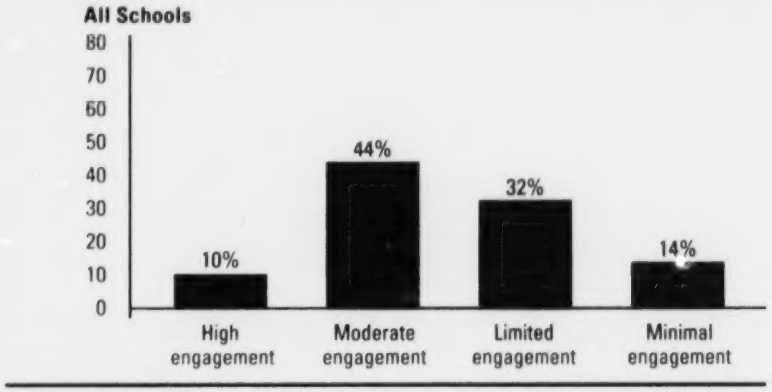
Compared to eighth graders in other urban schools, Chicago eighth graders are not as likely to look forward to their classes.

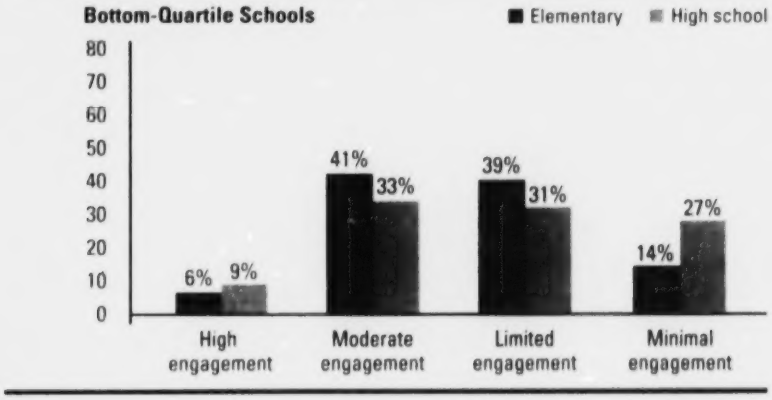
Academic Engagement



Academic Engagement
Students' Responses in High- and Low-Rated Schools







erate engagement, compared to 67 percent in top-rated schools. Among high schools, there is less variation. Forty-two percent of tenth graders in low-rated high schools are classified as *highly* or *moderately engaged*, compared to 56 percent in top-rated high schools.

With half or more of Chicago students indicating *limited* or *minimal* engagement with academic work, it is difficult to imagine how they will attain the necessary skills and knowledge to prepare themselves for further education and the workplace. Just at the time when there is broad endorsement in society for higher educational standards, and when the most desirable jobs are likely to go to the highly trained, thousands of Chicago students are reporting weak academic engagement.

SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

Absenteeism

Since attending school is the most basic form of engagement, we asked sixth- and eighth-grade students how often they were absent during the 1993-94 school year.[4] More than half the elementary grade students reported few absences—zero to four days—and another quarter of the students indicated five to 10 days (next page). About a fifth of the students reported missing more than two weeks of school during the year, and a small percentage were absent for more than a month. Considering that the school year lasts 36 weeks, the latter group missed more than one day every two weeks. And this does not include regularly scheduled holidays. While the majority of students in sixth and eighth grade reported fairly good attendance habits, about 20 percent were absent frequently.

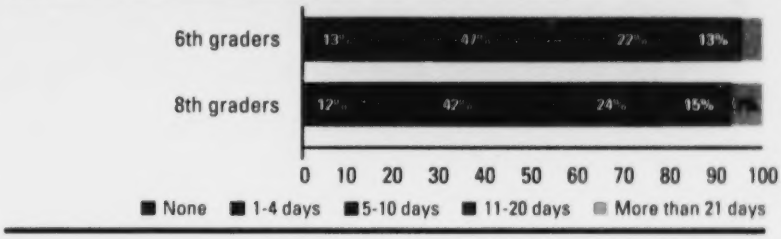
In contrast, absenteeism in tenth grade is an enormous problem. Based on information from students' transcripts,[5] the average tenth grader was absent 30 days in the 1993-94 school year. This is the equivalent of six weeks of lost instruction. About a quarter of the students were absent 21 to 40 days, or one to two months. Another quarter was absent more than 40 days, or more than two months.

These high school absence rate statistics are magnified somewhat because students are counted as absent for a half-day even if they miss just one class. Thus, a student who decides to cut English but attends the rest of his or her classes that day will be recorded as absent for half a day. Even so, the overall level of absenteeism in tenth grade is very high.

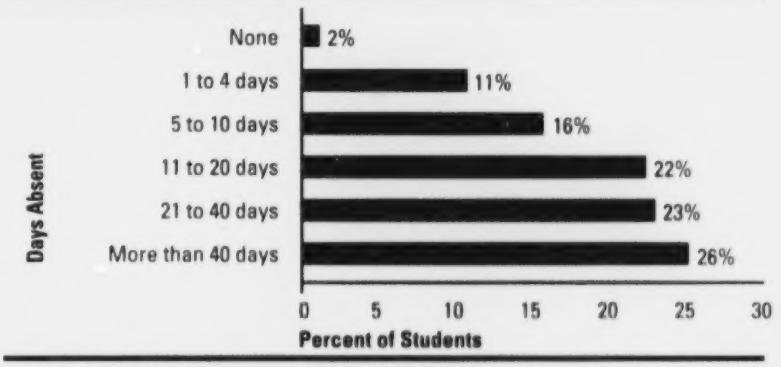
As previous studies have documented, students who are frequently absent are likely to drop out of school.[6] A study by the Chicago Panel on School Policy identified patterns of absenteeism as early as fourth grade that were predictive of dropping out of school.[7] Our data clearly show that a large group of students is chronically truant and, in all likelihood, in the process of dropping out. (In Chicago, a student who is 16 and absent for 20 consecutive school days is considered a dropout.)

Because of the excessive absenteeism in high schools and the strong relationship of absenteeism to dropping out, we decided to take a closer look at whether some high schools might be more effective than others in this regard. In general, Chicago's high schools vary substantially in their absenteeism rates. In 17 percent of the schools, students are absent on average between 11 and 20 days per year. In the most troublesome schools, however, a typical student is absent more than 40 days.

About how many days have you been absent this school year?

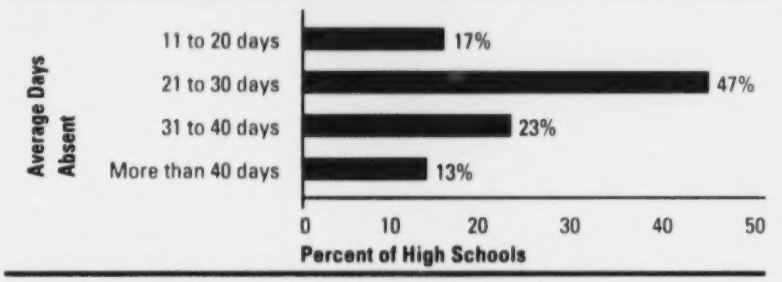


Total Absences
Tenth Graders, 1993–94



Source: Administrative records, Chicago Public Schools.

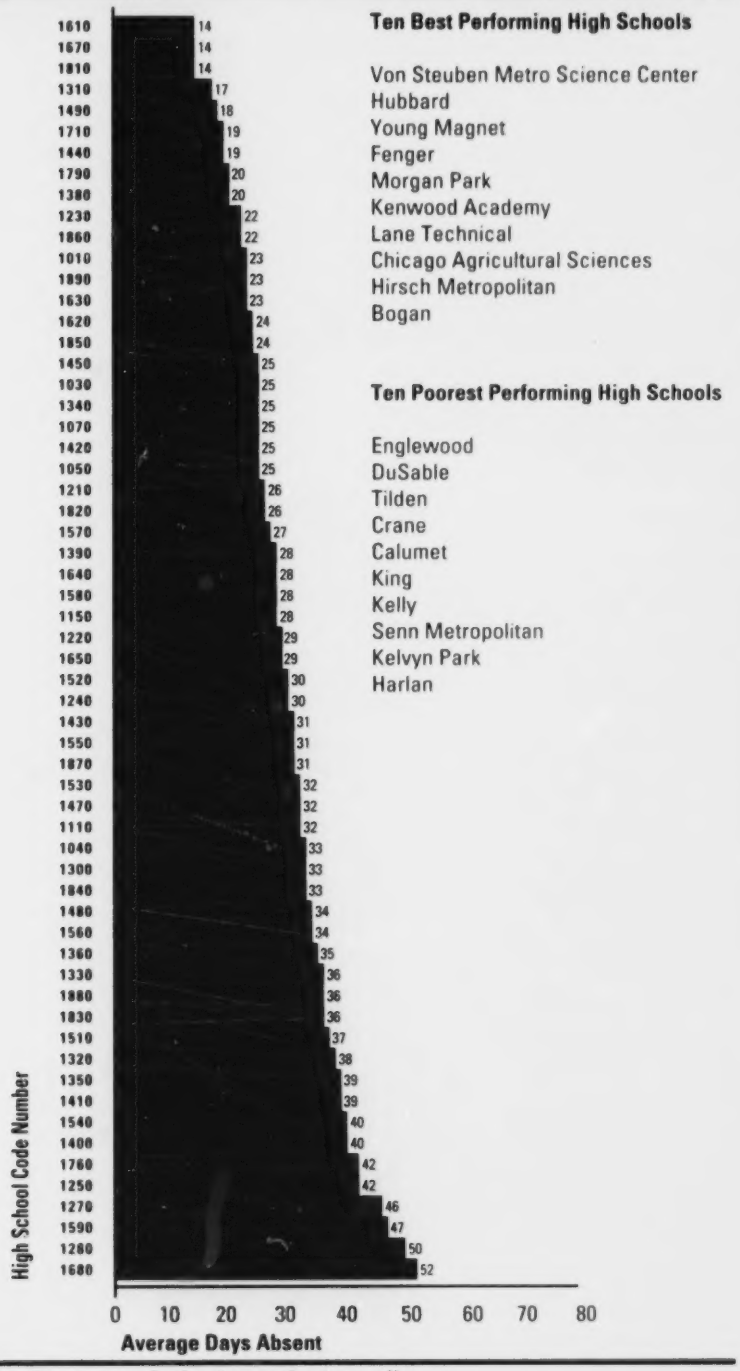
Average Absenteeism for High Schools
Tenth Grade, 1993–94



Source: Administrative Records, Chicago Public Schools.

It is important to recognize that there are differences among high schools in the kinds of students they enroll. Some schools, such as Whitney Young, attract academically talented students who are very committed to learning. Others, particularly neighborhood high schools, serve a much more academically disadvantaged students. This raises an important prior question: Is there really any difference among Chicago high schools in absenteeism once we take into account the types of students they enroll? To answer this question, we undertook an analysis that estimated an adjusted absenteeism rate for each school. These ad-

Average Absenteeism for High Schools (Adjusted for Different Types of Students Enrolled) Tenth Grade, 1993–94



Note: For names of schools, see the Appendix.

justed rates represent the predicted level of absenteeism for each school, had that school served "average students."[8] In essence, we parceled out the effects of student characteristics, so that we could explore possible school effects.

The results show that, even after controlling for differences in the types of students enrolled, absenteeism varies substantially among the city's high schools. In the 10 schools with the lowest rates, the estimated number of days absent range from 14 days at Von Steuben Metro Science Center to 22 days a year at Bogan High School. Among the ten schools with the highest predicted absenteeism, the averages vary from 39 days at Harlan Community Academy to 52 days a year at Englewood Technical Preparatory Academy.[9] Clearly, some schools are able to encourage much higher levels of attendance than others.

Using the survey data, we investigated whether there were characteristics of schools that contributed to more positive attendance habits. In looking for possible answers to this question, we examined the various indicators of the essential supports for student learning, developed both here and in our previous report, *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*. A number of school features stand out.[10]

We found lower absenteeism in high schools where teachers report:

- A strong commitment to teaching in their current school (school commitment) and
- Trusting relationships among the teachers (social trust).

We also found lower absenteeism in high schools where students report that:

- Their parents talk with them about school, encourage them to work hard, and monitor their homework (parents' involvement in students' learning at home).
- Their teachers press them to do well academically (press toward academic achievement).

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- Most of their friends try hard to do well in school (peer support for academic work).
- Their classrooms are cooperative and relatively free of disruptions (classroom behavior).
- They feel mostly safe in school (safety).

Thus, these results point to the importance of teachers' cooperative effort and commitment, parent involvement, and a positive learning climate in promoting better attendance.

Tardiness

Another key behavioral indicator of engagement and effort is arriving at school on time. Students were asked how often they were late during the past school year. Similar to attendance, most sixth and eighth graders report being on time fairly consistently. A small subgroup—12 percent of the sixth graders and 19 percent of the eighth graders—did, however, indicate they were late more than six times. Many unavoidable circumstances may interfere with getting to school on time, yet frequent lateness is inconsistent with norms that emphasize student responsibility and effort.

Like attendance, habits of promptness decline as students grow older and move into high school. Among tenth graders, almost one-third reported being late for school seven times or more.

Class Cutting

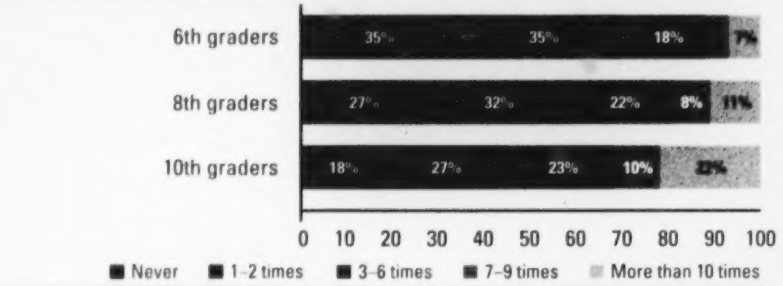
When asked how many times they cut or skipped classes, the vast majority of sixth graders indicate they have not cut classes at all. Among eighth graders, class cutting is a bit more prevalent, with one-quarter saying they have cut or skipped classes during the school year. Two-thirds of the tenth graders, however, report they cut class at least once, and almost 25 percent indicate they cut classes more than six times. This level of class cutting, combined with high rates of absenteeism and tardiness in the high schools, seriously erodes the amount of time students spend in class, and therefore their opportunity to learn.

On balance, it is important to acknowledge that, while students (and their families) bear a responsibility for regularly attending school, the educational program they experience also plays a key role in encouraging such attendance. As documented earlier in this section, many students found instruction neither interesting nor challenging. Actual observations of classroom instruction, which will be reported in our next study, suggest that many students experience dull and repetitive classroom activities day after day, and even year after year. If classroom activities provide little variety or challenge, students may view occasional class cutting as a harmless act that makes little difference to their learning or success.

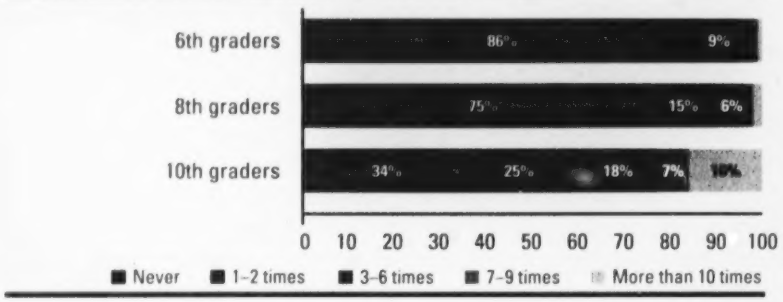
We note that frequent class cutting has been a long standing problem in the CPS. In a 1986 study of eight high schools, the Chicago Panel on School Policy reported levels of class cutting comparable to those reported here. In fact, Panel researchers characterized the phenomenon as a "culture of cutting," in which students did not feel it was a serious offense to skip class.[11] This characterization seems equally appropriate today.

The contrasts between elementary and high schools presented in this section appear quite stark. Even taking into account the tendency of students to under-report absences, most sixth- and eighth-grade students come to school fairly regularly, arrive on time,

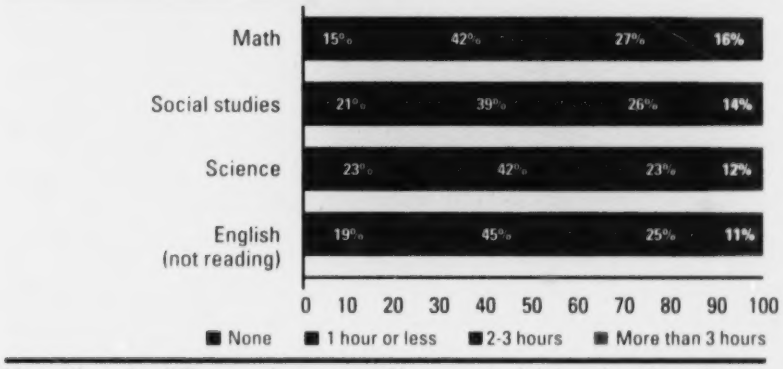
How many times this year have you been late for school?



How many times this year have you cut or skipped classes?

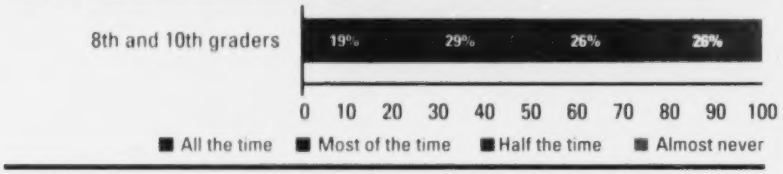


About how much time each week do you spend outside of school on homework for this class?
Eighth-and Tenth-Grade Students



Note: Since the differences in amount of homework eighth and tenth graders report doing are minimal, we have combined their responses for this graph.

We start our homework in class
Math, Social Studies, Science, and English



and go to class. A relatively small portion—and a somewhat larger portion at eighth grade—are regularly absent, tardy, or cut class. However, at the high school, such disengagement is widespread. Virtually half the students are absent a month or more from school, and class cutting is common. In many high schools, such behavior appears normative—it is just part of attending school in Chicago. To be sure, this is not without its consequences. Many students quickly slip far behind, and catching up is very difficult. As we document in Section III, the disengagement reported here takes its toll in very high course failure rates, even among "good students."

Homework

Despite the fact that most students report they are working hard to do their best, the majority of eighth and tenth graders indicate they do little or no homework. Fifteen to 20 percent of the students checked "none" on our surveys. The largest group, 40 to 45 percent, indicate they spend one hour or less a week on each subject. Thus, in terms of work done each day, more than half the students report either that they do no homework at all or that they do less than an hour per night. On the other hand, about a quarter of the students report doing two to three hours a week of homework per subject. This amounts to about two hours a night. Another 11 to 16 percent say they are doing even more homework per night.

The actual amount of time students spend outside of class on homework is probably related to the common practice of starting homework in class. Nearly half the students report that they start their homework in class "most" or "all the time." Another quarter claim they start their homework in class about "half the time."

In principle, well designed homework assignments create opportunities to extend learning beyond the classroom. And there are good reasons for teachers to ask students to begin homework in class; it assures that students understand the task well before they try to do it independently. Nevertheless, if students are not given much homework to begin with, and teachers routinely have students start homework in class, this further limits the amount of time available for teaching and learning.

When we examine the evidence on effort and engagement we have assembled thus far, a disturbing picture comes into focus. On the one hand, we have found positive indicators of engagement for most elementary school students. They generally report that they have reasonably good attendance records, that they arrive at school on time, and that they do not cut classes. Reports of academic engagement are somewhat less positive, with only about half the students in both grades six and eight indicating *moderate* to *high* engagement.

At the high school, however, more than half the tenth-grade students report only *minimal* or *limited* levels of engagement with schooling. In addition, these students do not attend school regularly, often arrive late, and cut classes. This pattern of behavior not only undermines academic learning, but, if extended to the workplace, could preclude their success in obtaining and keeping a job.

Perhaps most perplexing of all is the juxtaposition of students' self re-

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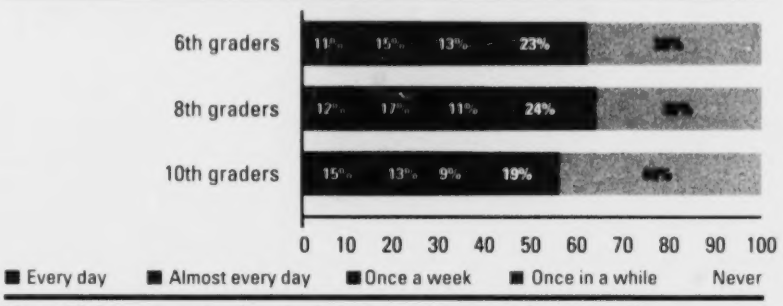
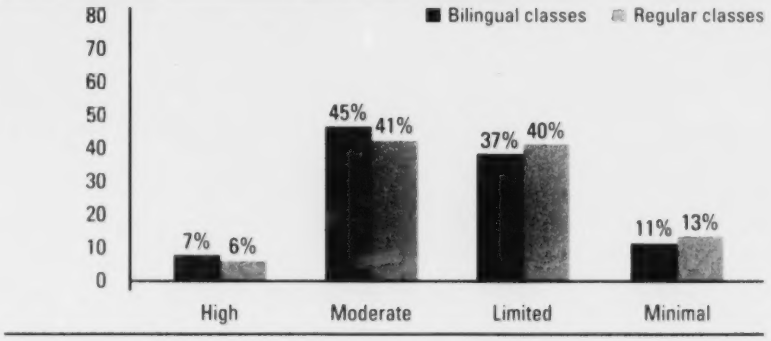
ports about their effort in school and the evidence regarding absenteeism, tardiness, and class cutting. Seventy-six percent of the tenth graders report that they work hard to do their best, yet they are frequently absent, tardy, or cut class. These same students also report doing very little homework. Without deeper conversations with students, it is difficult to speculate on the precise meaning of these apparent contradictions. At a minimum, however, it does raise questions about the standards students employ when they report that they are "doing their best."

This year, how often have you participated in school clubs or organizations?



Note: Clubs or organizations include sports teams, student council, cheerleading, drama club, school newspaper, and other activities.

Academic Engagement
Hispanic Sixth- and Eighth-Grade Students



Participation in Clubs and Sports

Extracurricular activities can be a very effective device for engaging students with the school. Such activities not only provide useful experiences that enhance students' personal development, they also help students see the school as a place of meaningful social participation, and this can promote student engagement in the school's academic mission. Research has shown a strong relationship between participation in school clubs and organizations and academic achievement. In addition, special programs and schools that work with at-risk students have found extracurricular activities an important component in this overall strategy.[12]

Unfortunately, this opportunity has been lost for thousands of Chicago children. Responses from students reveal that only a minority in either elementary or high school participate at least once a week in a club, organization, sport, or other activity. More than 60 percent of the students have no sustained involvement. It is worth noting that, since this survey was conducted, labor contracts have been revised to eliminate the requirement to pay custodial staff overtime during after-school activities. This change makes it easier for schools to offer more after-school activities.

DIFFERENCES AMONG STUDENTS IN ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

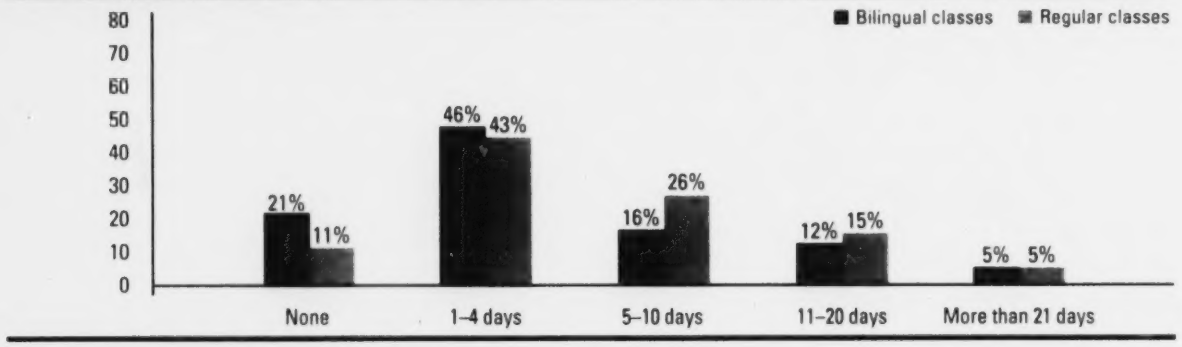
As in Section I of this report, we undertook analyses that examined differences among students in their academic engagement and school participation. We considered differences among students with respect to gender, race and ethnicity, income level, and bilingual status. In addition, we probed whether students who are bused to school have different perceptions from other students. Again, observed differences are small. Two consistent patterns, however, do emerge.

At the elementary school level, boys and girls generally offer similar ratings of academic engagement (i.e., the scale formed from survey responses about working hard, doing homework, being interested in topics, and looking forward to class). Girls are only slightly more likely to report moderate and high engagement. Thirty-five percent of the girls' responses, compared to 30 percent of the boys' responses, fall in these top two categories (not shown). This pattern also occurs

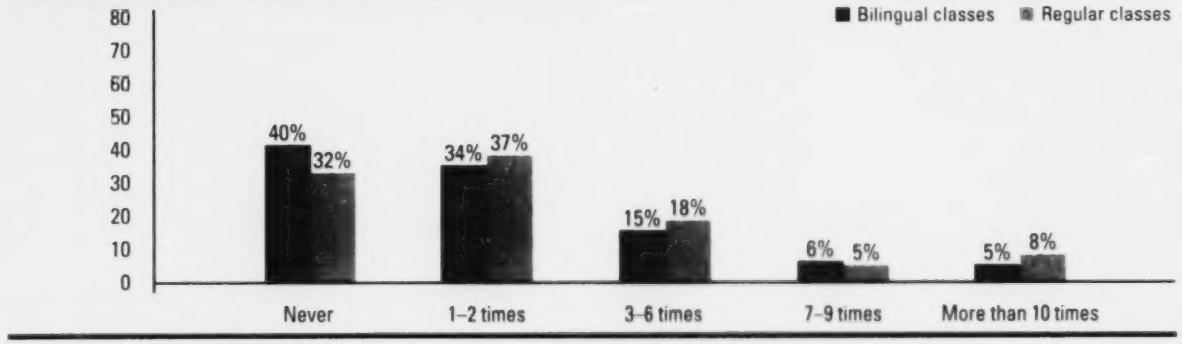
among high school students. With respect to other indicators of academic effort considered—absences, tardiness, class cutting, homework, and extracurricular participation—we find comparable small differences between boys and girls.

The only other consistent difference among students occurs for bilingual and non-bilingual classes. We found that students in elementary bilingual education classes are more likely than other students to score high on the academic engagement scale. (As we did with indicators of student-centered learning climate, we specifically investigated differences between bilingual and non-bi-

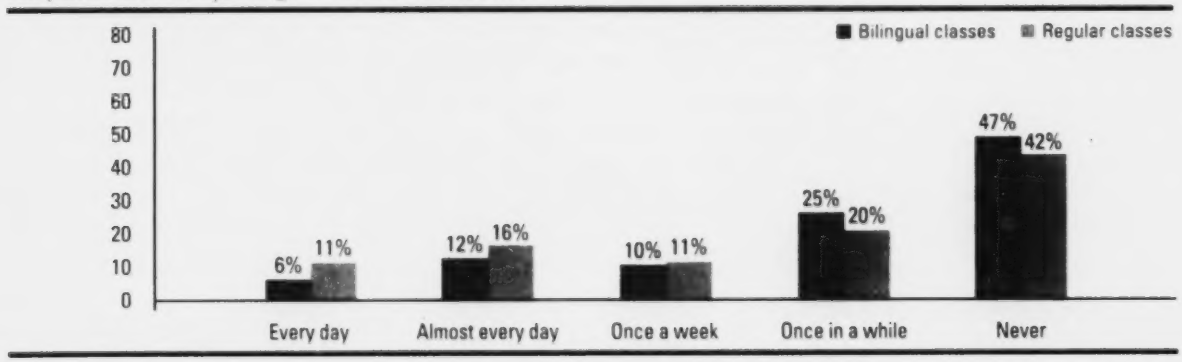
Reported Absences
Hispanic Sixth- and Eighth-Grade Students



How many times this year have you been late for school?
Hispanic Sixth- and Eighth-Grade Students



I participated in school clubs or organizations
Hispanic Sixth- and Eighth-Grade Students



lingual classes among Hispanic students.) Students in bilingual classes are more likely to report *moderate* to *high engagement* and are less likely to report being absent or late. With respect to involvement in clubs and organizations, however, they participate less than students who are not in bilingual education classes. A similar pattern is found among tenth-grade students (not shown).

DIFFERENCES AMONG SCHOOLS IN ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

How schools might foster better engagement and participation among students is an important question. As in the analysis of absenteeism just reported, we examined possible school effects on students' reports of academic engagement, class cutting, tardiness, homework, and participation in clubs and organizations. We looked for characteristics of schools that were consistently associated with more positive levels of student effort. In the analysis, we controlled for several demographic factors, including the income level of the neighborhood surrounding the school, the percentage of low-income students, the racial composition of the student body, and the stability of the student population. In addition, we examined the average achievement levels and the effects of school size.[13]

A key concern is whether the characteristics of a student-centered learning climate, discussed in the previous section, actually promote greater engagement and participation. Recall that a student-centered learning climate is one of the CPS's five essential supports for student learning. In essence, we were examining the validity of one aspect of the framework. Is there any evidence in Chicago that the nature of the learning climate actually makes a significant difference in student effort?

The results show that, among elementary schools, demographic factors such as the income level of the community around the school, the percentage of low-income students within the school, and the stability of the student population are not strongly related to student engagement and participation. Further, there is no consistent pattern for schools with respect to racial composition of the students. The only exception to this is that students in primarily African-American elementary schools are more likely to report higher levels of academic engagement, homework, and participation in clubs.

Regarding the effects of learning climate, however, the results are highly consistent. In elementary schools with higher ratings on learning climate, students report fewer absences, less class cutting and tardiness, more academic engagement, more time spent on homework, and greater participation in clubs and sports. Thus, students are more likely to be engaged and to commit greater effort in schools where teachers combine personal concern with academic demands, where peers work hard, where classrooms are orderly, and where they feel safe.

Among high schools, the results are similar. The student and neighborhood characteristics have little impact on students' efforts. Instead, students report higher levels of academic engagement, more time spent on homework, and more participation in clubs and organizations in schools rated high on student-centered learning climate.

Laying out research results is one matter. Putting these ideas into practice in a school is another. What appears simple and logical in analyses may be quite subtle and complex inside a school. In Marsalis High School (a pseudonym), the principal and the teachers are making a valiant effort to transform the school climate and engage students in a more personalized, yet demanding program. While the school is moving in a direction consistent with what this research suggests, much more time, concentrated effort, and perseverance will be required to fully implement the vision and provide worthy learning experiences for all students.

Marsalis High School: Struggling to Improve Student Engagement

One of the first things you see when you enter Marsalis High School are "Student of the Month" posters. The posters honor selected students for a range of academic and civic achievements. The students pose proudly in the photos, which brighten up an aging building in need of repairs. The posters are a small but significant victory. In the past, school pride has not been cool at Marsalis, and some academically successful students still avoid public praise.

Student of the month is one of the many efforts Marsalis' staff are making to reverse two decades of academic decline and failure. It's an extremely difficult job. Marsalis serves adolescent children from deeply impoverished, housing project families. Many Marsalis students have parents and grandparents who did not themselves enjoy high school or benefit from it.

For students surrounded by unemployment, teen pregnancy, loitering, and gang activity, faith in school success and in the future is hard to come by. For that and other reasons, absenteeism, tardiness, course failure, and dropping out are all part of daily life in the school.

In 1989 Marsalis hired a new principal committed to turning the school around by ending its isolation, developing new programs, and pushing teachers to learn new skills through intensive staff development initiatives. Since then, much has clearly changed. Alcohol and drugs are no longer bartered on the premises, student mobility in and out of the school has decreased, talented young teachers have been recruited, and the staff is working hard to develop effective teaching teams that maintain engagement with students until they graduate. Teachers and the principal also have worked to create a more positive school climate in which students can work and learn. But finding a way to secure safety and order while nurturing a sense of personalism and support has been difficult.

The balancing act begins each morning as students walk through the entrance. Safety concerns require guards and metal detectors, but such a search process degrades the school from a learning zone into a security zone. To provide a warmer welcome, Marsalis' staff instead chose to inspect personally students' identification cards. Teachers have suggested that a display of books, pen, and paper would be a much better entrance card, but realities tend to rule this out. Once students enter, teachers try to greet them by name and hustle them to their first period class with encouraging words.

Many days, only half the students make it. Efforts at Marsalis to impart a sense of seriousness and purpose to school are ravaged by an absentee rate that fluctuates between 45 and 60 percent, depending on the day of the week and the time of the year. And some students who attend regularly arrive late, entering classrooms empty-handed and aimless, five to 25 minutes after the bell. Last year Marsalis was plagued by false fire alarms, more than a dozen a week during one month. It's a situation that stymies the staff. "We can't keep the kids in when we want them in, and we can't keep them out when we want them out," explained one teacher. Confronted each day with a different mix of attending students and unstable instructional time, Marsalis' teachers face an uphill battle to make any steady progress in their instructional programs.

Everyone at Marsalis shares these frustrations, but people do not agree on how to combat them. Many are deeply pained with how the turmoil affects hard-working students and want stronger rules and sanctions. But many others feel that increased controls and punishments further discourage attendance and create a school laden with tensions, conflicts, and animosities. Rather than constantly battling the negative, many at Marsalis want to focus and build upon the positive changes and improvements that have already been made.

In many ways, Marsalis is a positive and improving school—certainly more positive than the local streets. Students courteously introduce themselves to visitors and welcome them with pride to "our school." Participation and achievement in activities such as the school newspaper, band, computer science club, and the citywide science fair have grown in recent years. Students speak highly of their teachers, many of whom spend their preparation and lunch periods tutoring students in their classrooms. Many teachers monitor their students closely for signs of trouble and make phone calls to parents and friends as often as possible. Efforts to provide role models to students, particularly African-American males, are constant. These efforts come out of teachers' personal caring and devotion; they are not required by collective bargaining agreements, and they are rarely acknowledged.

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Marsalis also has made efforts to improve the standards and quality of its instructional programs. Demands for student respect, cooperation, and support for academic work have risen, as has the substantive quality of some of the curriculum and learning activities assigned to students. And the entire staff is involved in the development of a network of small schools. Unfortunately, the process used has tended to aggravate rather than diminish the sense of disruption that beleaguers the school. Marsalis' efforts to run and redesign the school at the same time have not proved very effective. To carve out staff development time, the school often shortens classes or puts students into assemblies so teachers can work together to develop new school curricula. At other times, the entire school is called into the auditorium for motivational gatherings or a speech by the principal. Individually, the efforts seem reasonable and commendable, but their cumulative effect is much less so. "We need change, but I feel like we are always halfway down a dozen different roads," explained one teacher. "We spend all this time developing teacher-student teams, but we're still spread all over the school." Said another, "Half the time I don't know what is going on. I don't know if we are in meetings or in class or what. I can't get to half the work I want to get to."

Marsalis' staff members are always hoping that this year's loss is next year's gain, that new ideas and directives will help them overcome the enormous obstacles they face. But students will not be the only ones needing to unlearn bad habits if Marsalis is ever to secure a positive climate, a cohesive academic program, and greater commitment to schooling among its students. Lurching from one plan to another has undermined the very outcomes it has hoped to achieve—an orderly school climate that supports high student engagement in a focused instructional program. The importance of a positive learning climate as a basis for strong student engagement is well understood at Marsalis, but it has yet to become a characteristic of daily school life.

Section III

Academic Difficulty during the High School Transition

By Melissa Roderick and Eric Camburn

Students confront more challenging academic demands as they enter high school. This "raising of the bar" is accompanied by a dramatic change in school learning climate. As documented in the first section of this report, the typical high school environment is quite different from what is found in many of the city's elementary schools. Not surprisingly, students experience this change as a sharp transition in their lives, and many fail to thrive.

This section takes a closer look at the transition to high school. We begin with some students' personal accounts about their own experiences. We then turn to a detailed analysis of students' course failure patterns during the first four semesters of high school.[1] These student stories and transcript analyses provide new data with which to understand the problems faced by adolescents in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). This is a story about widespread student difficulties in the transition to high school. Moreover, the problems documented here are not limited just to ninth grade, but extend well beyond. Failure is routine in Chicago public high schools. Tens of thousands of students do just that every year.

Derrika: High Hopes but a Troubled Transition

Derrika, an African-American student in a south side school, has always been a good student. One of her elementary school teachers said she "worked well. She asked a lot of questions if she didn't understand. She used other resources to find the answer. . . . A good student academically." She particularly liked to be challenged and, in eighth grade, described learning as fun and her teachers as caring and really making her work. Derrika said that she knew her eighth grade teachers cared, "Because if they didn't . . . they would just let us sit and talk, do anything we want to all day long and not get us doing anything, not let us learn. . . . But I think they care because they give us work."

Derrika entered high school with plans to go to college and felt that her strong sense of self would get her through. "Nobody stops me from doing good because I really wanna go to college. . . . Nobody in my family's been to college . . . so I want to be the first person to go to college and finish. . . . I wanna make the family real proud of that."

Derrika's peers are a negative influence. As her favorite teacher described her, "Derrika is a leader, but her choice of acquaintances is not the best. She's known to have friends who are in gangs. Often times, Derrika will be found in the midst of a dispute with other people. . . . Derrika could use a change of environment in order to succeed to her fullest potential."

Derrika abruptly began to show some signs of misbehavior and poor performance in the eighth grade. Despite high achievement scores and very high grades throughout her elementary school, Derrika's grades were low in eighth grade. She had a C average in her core subjects and failed science. In high school, Derrika's performance deteriorated even further. During the first quarter, she received two Fs, one C, and one D, was skipping courses, had poor attendance, and was suspended once for being in a food fight in the cafeteria. By the end of the semester, Derrika received Fs in all her core courses and had 20 absences, including almost 33 class cuts for the last two periods of the day.

Derrika is vague when it comes to accounting for her current performance and takes very little responsibility for her behavior. She admits she is

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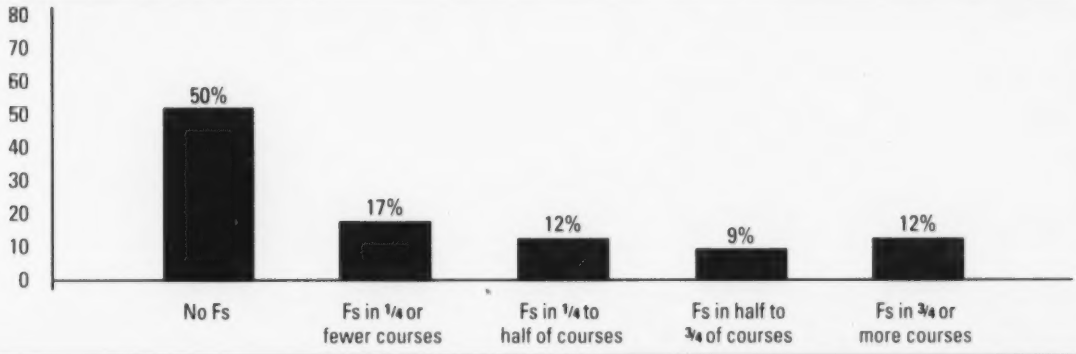
failing biology because "I don't never get up on time." She explains that she failed another course because of not handing in one assignment, but neglects to mention that she has skipped the class 12 times. She feels that teachers at her elementary school were better because, "If you don't want to learn, they are going to make you learn." She feels that her current teachers think, "If you fail, you just fail. It ain't our fault. You're the one that's dumb."

Derrika's mother is a single parent in her twenties, who, like her daughter, feels that the school has failed her. Although she is very concerned about her daughter's school performance, she is not sure what to do, beyond pleading with her to attend classes and concentrate on her work. She believes that Derrika has fallen into the wrong crowd and submits to peer pressures to ditch classes. She hears of her daughter's performance through word of mouth. Because of the distance from home, Derrika's mother rarely visits the high school, and she feels frustrated by an unhelpful staff. She finds it difficult to assist with homework because the problems are too difficult and finds it hard to monitor her daughter's performance. She would like to transfer Derrika to another school after this marking period if she can find a better place.

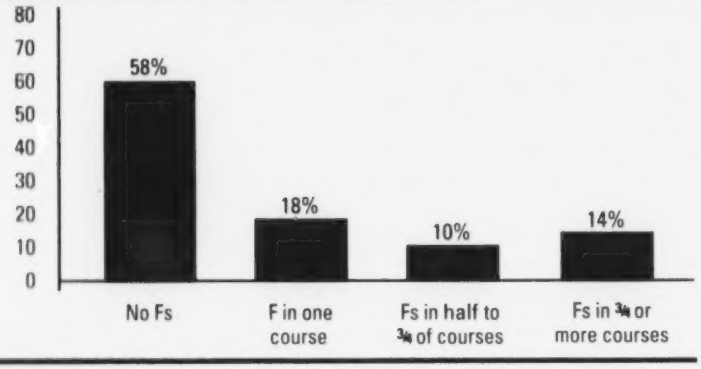
Total Courses Failed in First Semester of High School
Ninth Graders, Fall 1992



Background on High School Transition Work at the Consortium

During the past several years, many efforts at the Consortium on Chicago School Research have focused attention on the transition to high school in Chicago. The 1994 student survey examined differences in the experiences of eighth and tenth graders and included some specific questions about the transition to high school. In addition, Professor Melissa Roderick of the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago, and Eric Camburn from the Consortium staff, began a quantitative investigation of course failure patterns for 27,612 students who formed the Chicago Public Schools' entering ninth-grade class of 1992. These analyses drew upon students' high school transcripts and survey data. A third project, focusing explicitly on the transition into high school, began during spring 1995. With Melissa Roderick as its Principal Investigator, the Student Life in High Schools Project (SLP) takes an intensive look at the transition process by following 98 students from the end of eighth grade to the end of tenth grade. SLP researchers interview students once every three months, collect data on elementary and high school performance, ask teachers for their assessment of the child's performance and engagement in each year, and survey parents to gain their perspective. This study is ongoing. The students' stories presented here are drawn from SLP data.

Core Academic Courses Failed in First Semester of High School Ninth Graders, Fall 1992



As Derrika's story illustrates, the early years of high school are a challenging period for urban adolescents. As they move from neighborhood elementary schools to high schools, Chicago students are called upon to form new social attachments and to deal with increasing independence. They face new intellectual challenges and new academic demands. When high schools, families, and communities provide supportive environments, the early years of high school can be a time of positive emotional and intellectual growth. Too often, however, the ninth and tenth grades are a time of academic failure, decline in school engagement, and school withdrawal. Like Derrika, many students succumb to peer pressure and behave in ways that undermine academic achievement. Episodes like these are much more likely in the absence of sustained positive encouragement from parents and teachers to behave otherwise.

Many high school students experience ninth grade as Derrika has. About half of Chicago ninth graders fail at least one course, and more than 20 percent fail more than half of their courses. In core subjects—English, mathematics, social studies, and science—the picture is equally bleak. Of ninth graders who entered CPS high schools in 1992, 42 percent failed at least one core course in the first term, while nearly 24 percent failed half of their courses or more.

Anna: A Need for Personalism

Anna is a Mexican-American adolescent who entered high school with very good skills; her reading test scores in eighth grade placed her a year above grade level. In elementary school, Anna struggled with personal problems. Her parents separated; her mother, sisters, and Anna then moved. She also lost several friends to gang violence. The changes were hard on Anna: "'Cause like, my parents were having problems, and it's just, I guess it affected me. And, I didn't really want to do much. I don't know since my father left. It's not . . . the same anymore. I don't feel like doing nothing. That's when my grades started getting lower, and my mom started yelling at me. And I go, 'It's not my fault, you know, that he left. It's not my fault that my father left here.' That's why I'm like that. That's why I started changing. Like, so many things that happened all at once, that I started changing."

Anna received a lot of support from her elementary school teachers and the social worker in the school. One teacher in particular, Anna noted, "listens to you, like . . . she's the first one who asks about you; she shows that she cares. So, like if you see that someone cares about you, you know, you're not afraid. . . . Like she'll ask you what's . . . going on in your life. You know, tell you how you are every day. And if she does something . . . that hurts you, you know, she tells you that she's sorry." Anna's mother concurred. She felt that Anna's elementary school was "not a school; more like a second home, the home of the grandparents of the kids."[2] When she went to the school, she had "great meetings with teachers who gave specific details about what Anna could do to improve in class."

Anna knew that high school would be different. When asked what would be the biggest difference between eighth and ninth grade, she responded, "People here (eighth grade) are more aware of what happens to you. Over there, they're not. Probably they are, but not every little minute, not every day. Well, my sister tells me that it's gonna be more fun, because you're more involved in things, you know, you get to meet more people, and you get to express yourself more. . . . And they don't really treat you like little kids anymore, you know. You get . . . a sense of your being more mature."

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But Anna was not really prepared for the difficulty she would encounter in high school and was not able to handle the complexity of high school assignments and new responsibilities. In the first semester, she received mostly Ds and failed science. She describes most of her problems in courses being caused by disorganization and missing assignments.

(In geography) "He said the reason why I got a lower grade is 'cause I missed one assignment, and I had to do a report and I forgot that one."

(In English) "English. I got a C, and the reason why I got a C is 'cause we were supposed to keep a journal and I keep on forgetting it 'cause I don't have a locker. Well I do, but my locker partner—she lets her cousins use it—and I lost my two books there and I just don't want to leave my stuff and keep losing it…I would forget to buy a notebook and then I would have them on separate pieces of paper and I would lose them. Right now I do have a journal."

(And, in Biology) "The reason I failed was because I lost my folder, I left my backpack…and I lost it, and it had everything I needed and I had to do it again, and by the time I had to turn in the new folder, I did but he said it was too late…and I left it there and he said he didn't get it… 'cause I didn't have the folder and the folder has everything, all the work…The point is that he does require your work, but he wants you to record it yourself…That's why I got an F."

As Anna explains, most of her problems with grades stem not from difficulty in doing the work but from managing new high school demands. Few teachers are as supportive as her current math teacher who volunteers to help her get tutoring if she needs it. "If you miss your homework assignment…[he] gives you three days to turn it in, no more than four days…So, I mean, that's fair." In contrast, she feels strongly that most of her other teachers don't care, don't notice if she is having trouble or is working hard, and they are inflexible in their teaching.

Anna's mother is equally frustrated. At report card pickup, she felt that white teachers talked down to the Spanish-speaking parents and that the lack of interpreters was problematic. Even when she talked to Anna's teachers, she found them unhelpful. When she asked one teacher whether Anna turned in her homework, he said that it didn't matter. He said he doesn't collect homework. "It's the student's responsibility." She feels that teachers don't want to get to know the kids and that the school is unresponsive. Twice she has sent Anna to talk to a school counselor, but Anna never managed to see her. More than once, she ended up getting into trouble for being late to class after having waited to see the counselor. Anna's mother attributes this lack of response to the fact that there are too few counselors for so many students.

Anna's mother feels let down by the public schools. She sent her older daughters to Catholic schools, but since her divorce she cannot afford this for Anna. Despite all this, Anna has a clear goal of finishing high school, and she plans to go to college someday. Anna knows she is going to need more help from teachers in order to achieve these goals, but she believes she can do it.

Eli: A Student in Need of a Lifeline

Eli, an African-American student, entered high school with very weak academic skills. His scores placed him more than a year below grade level in reading and math. Even in eighth grade, his elementary school teachers reported that he seemed very unmotivated and did not complete assignments. A consistent concern, according to his eighth-grade teachers, was Eli's poor behavior; he was often disruptive and, on a few occasions, had to be sent out of class. They believed that Eli would have trouble adjusting to high school and the work load, and felt it probable that he would eventually drop out. Both Eli's elementary teachers talked to his parents about these academic and disciplinary problems but felt that the parents were only somewhat involved in supporting his education. Regardless, Eli ended eighth grade with Bs and Cs and Ds.

Eli thought high school would be difficult for him, and he is right. His classes are hard, particularly biology which, he explains, has a lot of math and "hard problems I couldn't even understand." Drafting, in which "exact measurement" is difficult, also became a problem. At the same time, his favorite subject is algebra, because "the teacher explains things well."

Eli's main problem is discipline. He has been suspended three times, mostly for activities that involve his friends. He attributes getting into trouble to "being in the wrong place at the wrong time." For example, in describing his suspension for a food fight, Eli explains:"I was sitting down and you know how it is; they just kept throwing food at each other. I'm just in the middle of it, just getting hit with food myself. . . . It all just happens, being in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Eli responded by going to class less and less frequently, as well as skipping school. By the end of the first semester, he accumulated 26 whole-day absences and had more than 50 absences in Biology alone. Between skipping school and suspensions, he missed so many classes that there was no way to keep up. Eli believes he just "got off on the wrong foot." In the first quarter, Eli received all Fs and one C. By the end of the first semester, he received all Fs. At mid-winter, Eli was going to school each day and resolving to do better, but spent most of the day in the lunch room. He clearly needs a lifeline but can't figure out how to get himself out of the mess he is in.

Eli's mother is frustrated by the high school's response to her son. She feels both that it is hard to get through to staff and that some disciplinary actions, such as suspensions for having braided hair, are too much. Just the same, she is very angry with Eli and established an early evening curfew. He appears to be hanging out with gangs, and she is hoping it is just a phase.

Even before high school, Eli knew that it was hard for him to get good grades. Now he focuses on being a good athlete. His dream is to play basketball and become famous. "Hopefully, I wanna be a basketball star. But if that won't happen, I haven't thought about what I'll fall back on." Eli's mother would also like for him to play basketball. She would like him to play on the high school team, but he cannot because of the low grades he has gotten so far.

Mike: Academic Difficulty Without Failure

Mike lives with his mom and dad, five siblings, and several cousins. Nine years ago, his mother and father migrated to the United States from Mexico and brought the children one year later. In elementary school, Mike was a good student who was described by both parents and teachers as responsible and easy going. He helps around the house with chores and with his younger siblings. Outside of school, Mike really enjoys playing soccer and has been on the same team for several years.

From Mike's teachers, it was easy to see why he got As and Bs and why he was in a gifted bilingual class. His teacher commented that, since he had come into the gifted class, he had shown great gains in reading but was still weak in comprehension due to his language. One teacher said, "Mike is a great student. However, I think that he would learn more if he were more vocal. He tends to do better in a cooperative learning environment where he can ask a friend rather than a teacher." Another teacher commented: "Mike is quiet!" He gets along well with everyone but tends to talk a lot only with his closer friends. He's a great person."

Mike got a partial scholarship to go to a Catholic high school, but the family could not afford the $300 down payment; so he ended up going to the local high school. Initially, Mike has had a very hard time at South West High. His grades in the first quarter fell to Bs and Cs, grades with which he is very unhappy. Mike is frustrated. He did his work and felt like he put effort into it, but he has gotten vague responses from his teachers about what he could do to bring his grades up. When asked what happened, Mike responded: "In English, they changed my teachers twice. The first teacher, well, she didn't explain things very well. . . . In Spanish, I really don't know, the teacher never told me anything. . . . I was doing good on all my homework. There was one guy that was getting into trouble all the time; he got punished more than me. I got in trouble once and he got a B in the class" (in comparison to Mike's C).

Mike's mother was equally frustrated when she talked to teachers at report card pickup. They were vague about why he got low grades. Although Mike translated, she had a hard time communicating with the non-Spanish-speaking teachers. The teachers she spoke with said he was fine academically, and she never got an answer for why Mike got a C.

Mike started going to the tutoring program with his friends. As he explained: "Lots of my friends go to tutoring. Also some students are sent by their teachers." By the end of the semester, he had managed to pull his English and Spanish grades up from Cs to Bs and his science grade to an A. Socially, however, Mike is still struggling. He feels uncomfortable being one of the youngest and smallest in the school, and sometimes feels physically overwhelmed by his peers.

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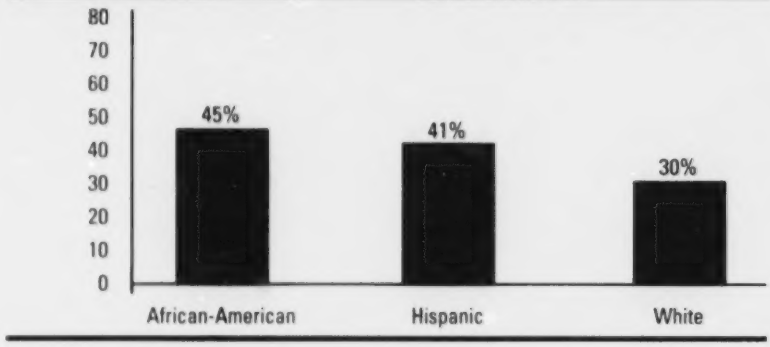
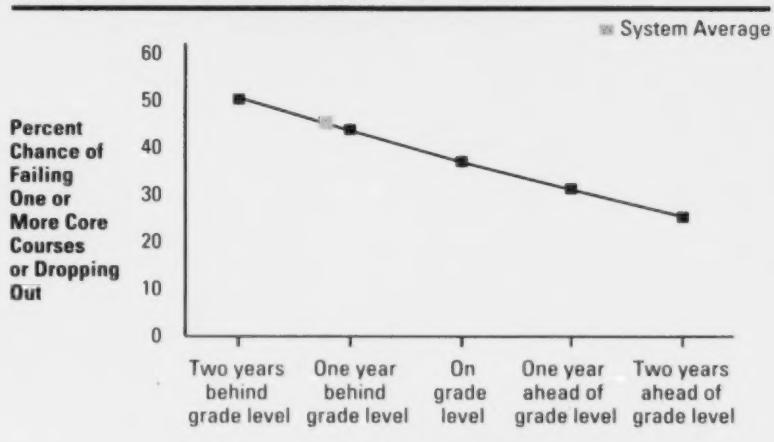
As Anna, Eli, and Mike discovered, the transition to high school typically involves moving to a larger, more complex, and impersonal environment. The average Chicago public high school student experiences an increase of more than 500 percent in the size of their grade-level group as they graduate from elementary school and move into high school. As documented in Section I, high school students are much more likely than elementary school students to feel that their teachers do not know them well, do not listen to them, and do not care about them. When asked "How many of your teachers will help with a personal problem?" eighth graders are more than twice as likely as tenth graders to report "all." These changes are stressful for students. They pose special risks for vulnerable students: those like Anna who rely upon teachers for critical support; like Eli who need extra help and intervention in dealing with increasing independence and new skill demands; and like Mike who may be anxious in the new high school setting.

Chance of Failing a Core Course, First Semester by Student's Race/Ethnicity Ninth Graders, Fall 1992



Poor Academic Readiness: A Major Cause of Difficulty in High School



Note: Academic readiness was determined by considering eighth grade math and reading scores together. Thus, "two years behind grade level" means a student's scores placed him or her two years behind in reading and math.

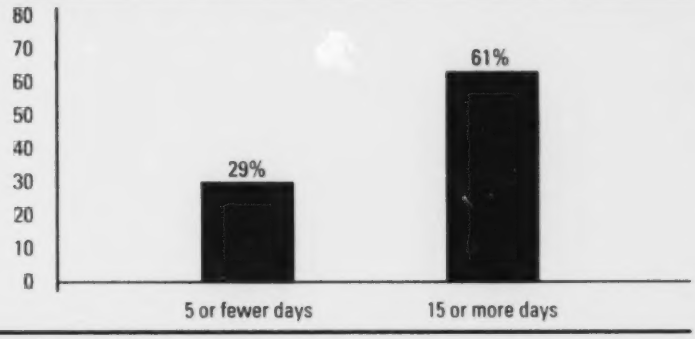
WHO FACES THE MOST DIFFICULTY IN THE TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL?

The overall rates of course failure among Chicago high school students are disturbingly high. But beyond these average statistics, some students are clearly more at risk than others.[3] African-American and Hispanic students, males, and students who are older than their classmates have higher failure rates. Many of the racial and ethnic differences in course failure rates can be attributed to the fact that minority students enter high school with poorer academic skills and attend school less regularly in the first semester.[4]

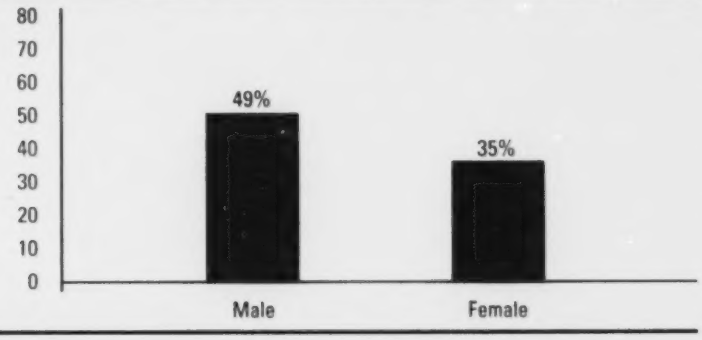
We viewed students' performance on the reading and math portions of the eighth-grade Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) as an important indicator of whether students have acquired the necessary basic skills to do high school work. For example, those whose reading and math scores in eighth grade were two years below grade level faced greatest difficulty during the first term in high school, and about a 50-50 chance of failing at least one core course in the first semester. These students may face more academic problems for several reasons. First, lacking basic academic skills, they encounter difficulty coping with the more advanced subject matter. Second, they also tend to lack the study skills necessary to cope with increased personal independence. And finally, students with lower skills may be less facile in adjusting to different teaching styles and learning environments that are typical in Chicago high schools.

Not surprisingly, course failure also is tightly linked to school atten-

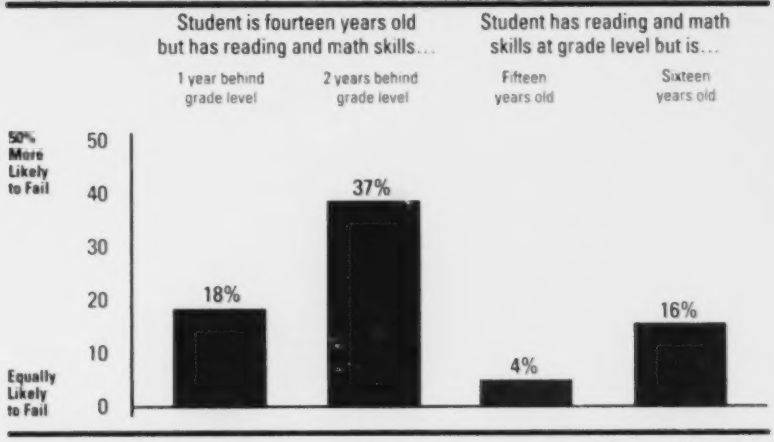
Chance of Failing a Core Course, First Semester by Number of Days Absent from School Ninth Graders, Fall 1992



Chance of Failing a Core Course, First Semester by Student's Gender Ninth Graders, Fall 1992



Both Academic Readiness and Student Age Affect Course Failure



Note: The vertical axis represents the increased chance of course failure in the first semester of ninth grade, compared to students who are fourteen years old (the normal age for ninth graders) and have reading and math skills at grade level.

Many Chicago ninth graders are both below grade level on standardized math and reading tests and older than normal when they enter high school. This analysis reveals that both academic performance on standardized tests and being old for grade independently affect the chances of course failure.

dance. Students who missed 15 or more days of school in the first semester were more than twice as likely to fail courses as those who missed five or fewer days of school. Attendance does not buffer students from failure (almost 30 percent of students with five or fewer days absent in the first semester failed a core course), but it is particularly important in differentiating among the number of courses students fail. The median number of absences was only slightly higher for students who passed all their courses than for those who failed only one core course, three versus seven days. The median number of absences, however, was 18 days for students who failed 50 percent or more of their courses.

Even when we account for the effects of attendance and prior achievement, males face additional risks. Male ninth graders have about a 50-50 chance of getting at least one F; the odds that a female will do the same are only about one in three. High school-aged males may face greater risk of failure for a variety of reasons. Males are more likely to be targets of gang recruitment and violence, activities that increase in high school. Males who are not in gangs may be particularly fearful as they move to larger, more heterogeneous schools. Males and females also may have different reactions to the less supportive and more stressful environments of high schools.

A final risk factor is entering high school over age for grade. This finding is consistent with prior research showing that students who are older than their peers face increased risk of dropping out.[5] When we look separately at the effect of achievement versus age, we find that students who enter high school over age for grade,

even if they are doing math and reading at grade level, face an increased risk of failing courses in the first semester. These results urge caution in trying to solve the problem of high school failure by retaining students in elementary schools.

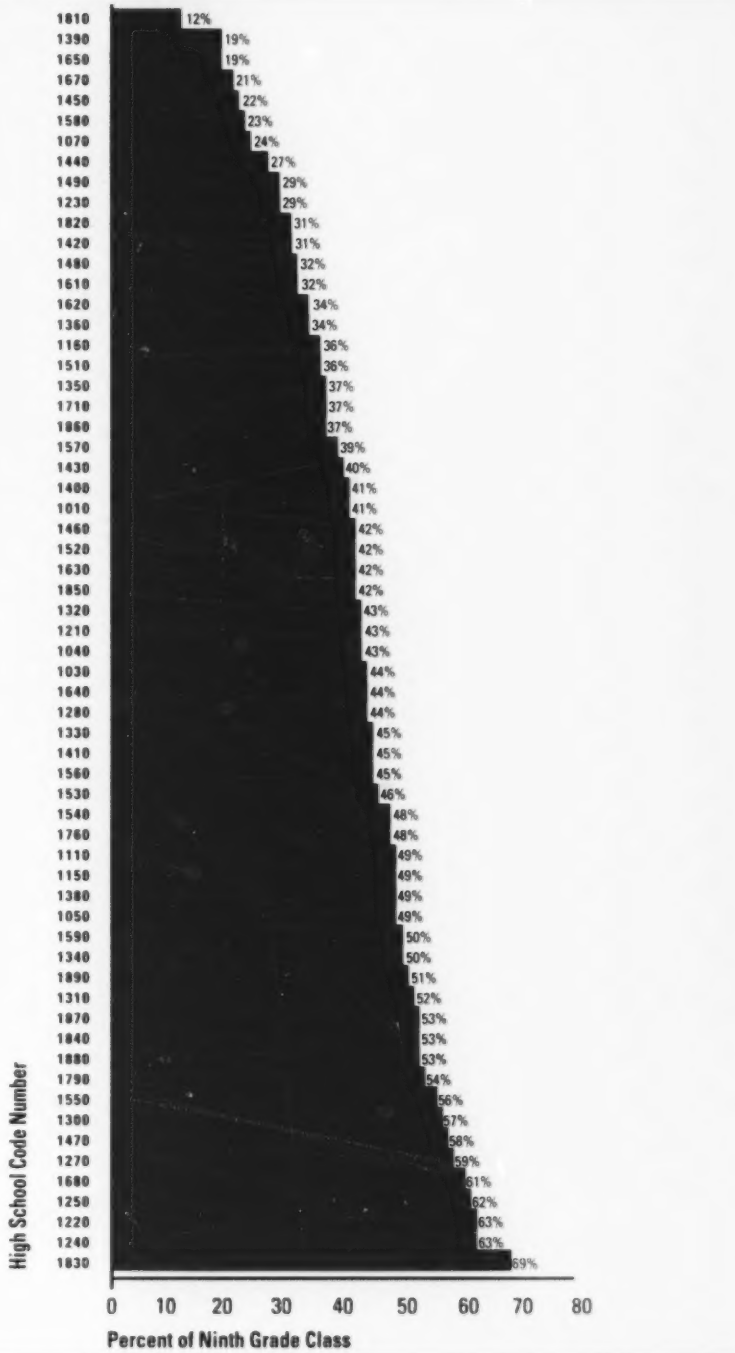
Finally, while this analysis helps us identify groups that may be particularly vulnerable, academic difficulty is not limited to an isolated group. Even top students, as Anna's case illustrates, often have difficulty. Students who enter high school at grade level in reading and math face a one-in-three chance of failing at least one core course. Those who enter high school with skills above average for their grade still face a 25 percent chance of failing a core course. Similarly, even those students who have good attendance in the first semester—those with five or fewer days absence—face a high risk of failing, 30 percent. Thus, having good skills and regular class attendance does not necessarily buffer students from academic failure in the CPS.

HOW DO SCHOOLS VARY IN RATES OF COURSE FAILURE?

High schools across the city differ dramatically in their course failure rates. In the 10 best performing schools—those with lowest failure rates—the average proportion of students failing at least one core course ranges from 12 percent at Whitney Young Magnet to about 30 percent at Bogan High School. Among the ten schools with the highest failure rates, the average proportion of students failing at least one core course in the first semester ranges from 54 percent at the Chicago Agricultural High School to nearly 70 percent at Orr Community Academy.

Large differences also are found when we look at the proprtion of students who experience serious academic difficulty (failing over half of their core course). In the 10 poorest preforming schools, almost one out of three entering ninth graders failed a majority of their core courses in the first semester.

Core Course Failure Rates, First Semester
Ninth Graders, Fall 1992



Note: Course failure rates include students failing one or more courses or dropping out. For names of schools, see the Appendix.

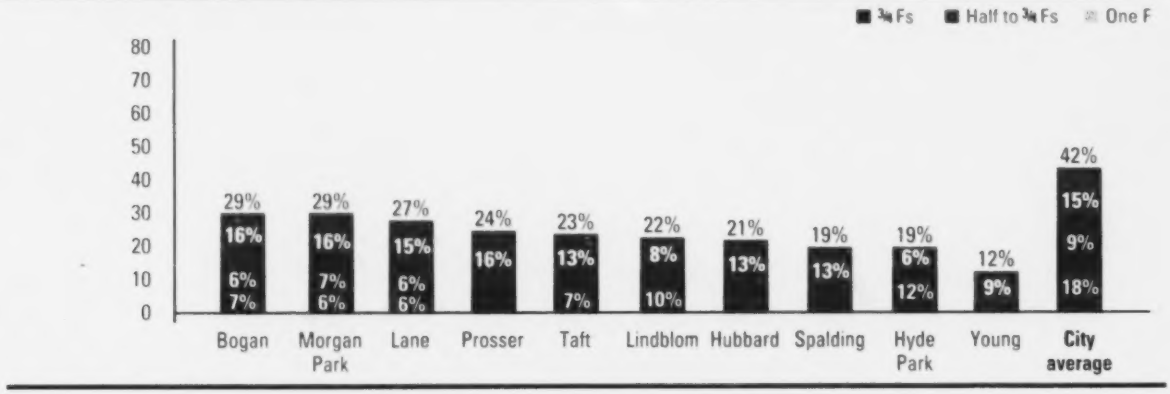
At the same time, serious problems of course failure are endemic to the whole system and not just located in the "worst" schools. Even among the top 10 performing schools, 10 percent of the students still fail half or more of their core courses.

This variation among high schools in course failure rates suggests that some high schools might be doing a better job than others at engaging students and preventing course failure.[6] We know, however, that some schools, like Whitney Young Magnet High School, have lower rates, at least in part, because they enroll better prepared and more motivated students. To evaluate possible school effects, we undertook an analysis that statistically controls for differences among schools in the achievement levels, demographic characteristics, and attendance patterns of students. Even after controlling for these differences among schools, however, substantial variation in course failure rates still exists.[7]

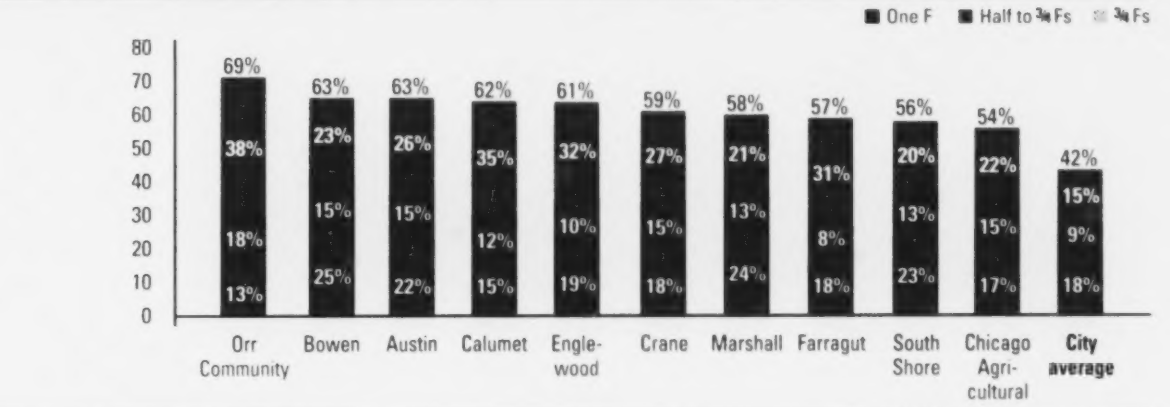
To understand this impact better, we compared the actual percent of students failing at least one course in the first semester in each school with adjusted course failure rates that take into account differences in the types of students each school enrolls in terms of race/ethnicity, family background, age, prior achievement, and current attendance.[8]

Most schools perform about as expected given the makeup of their student bodies. A few schools appear to do worse than expected (upper triangle), and some do considerably better than expected (lower inverted triangle).

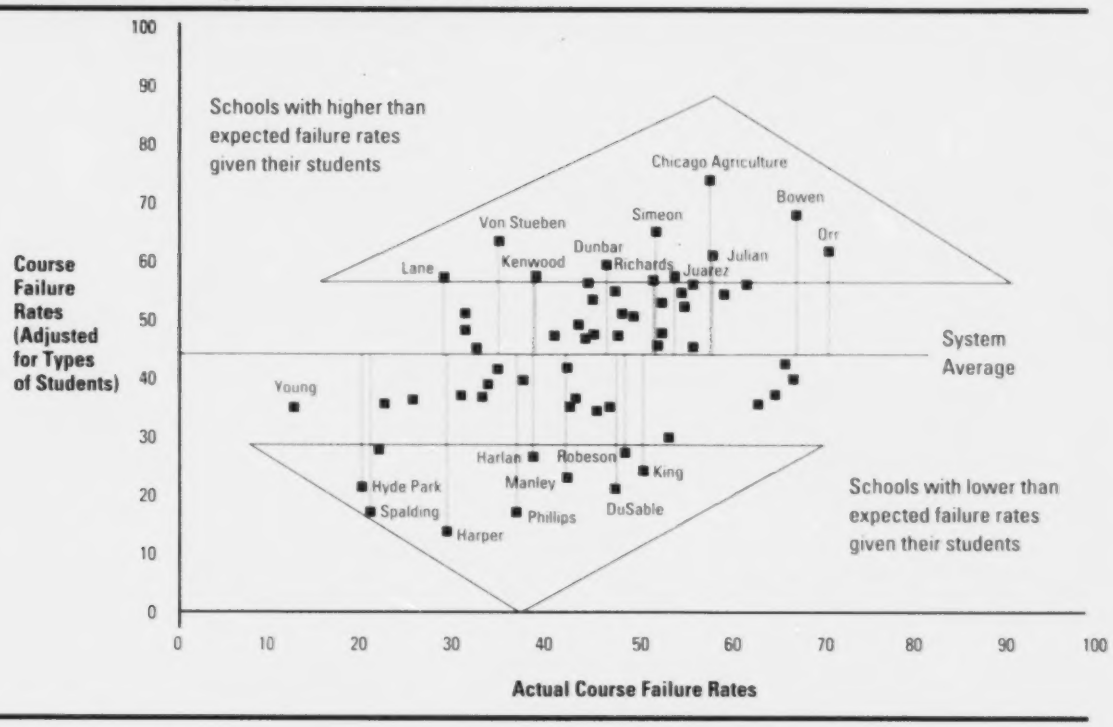
Core Course Failure Rates, First Semester
Ten Best Performing Schools



Core Courses Failure Rates, First Semester
Ten Poorest Performing Schools



Differences in School Failure Rates: Not Just a Matter of Types of Students Enrolled



Note: School course failure rates include students failing one or more courses or dropping out.

The horizontal axis in this graph is the proportion of students in the school who failed one or more core courses in the first semester. Thus, reading along the horizontal axis, the proportion of students who failed at least one core course ranged from 12 percent at Whitney Young to 70 percent at Orr Community Academy. The vertical axis describes the percent chance of an average Chicago student failing at least one core course were that "average student" to attend this school. ***If the only difference among schools in failure rates were differences in the types of students enrolled, the chance of failure would line up at the average for the city (approximately 45 percent).*** *A school's distance from the horizontal line indicates the extent to which the school has higher or lower course failure rates than expected, given the students it serves.*

Core Course Failure Rates, First Semester (Adjusted for Different Types of Students Enrolled) Ninth Graders, 1992

Note: Course failure rates include students failing one or more courses or dropping out. For names of schools, see the Appendix.

The analyses presented thus far suggest that Chicago high schools have very high failure rates because many Chicago students tend to be vulnerable to academic difficulty and because the environments of many Chicago high schools place students at even greater risk. We illustrate this latter point by comparing two schools that have similar failure rates, Manley and Dunbar, both of which serve African-American communities. Forty percent of the Manley students fail a core course in the first semester, while at Dunbar 44 percent fail—very similar rates. Yet, when we look deeper, we find that Manley serves a much more vulnerable group of students than Dunbar does. For example, ninth graders entering Manley had, on average, reading and math scores at less than the sixth-grade level. These scores were almost a full year lower than those for entering ninth graders at Dunbar. In addition, the average student at Manley was absent almost twice as often in the first semester as students at Dunbar (13.5 versus 6.8). When we account for these early attendance patterns and prior achievement, age, gender, and racial/ethnic composition of the student body, we end up with a dramatically different story. Manley ends up in the lower triangle and Dunbar in the upper one. Thus, our analysis predicts that an "average CPS student" at Manley has a 23 percent chance of failing one or more core courses in the first semester. The chances of course failure for a similar student at Dunbar would be 60 percent or nearly three times as high. In other words, Manley seems to be doing an above-average job with a below-average student body.

Charles: A Case of Recovery

Charles is an African-American student who has overcome many obstacles. His father has been in jail since he was born. While in elementary school, his mother got involved with drugs, and he and his two-year-old brother had to move in with relatives. His grandmother is very supportive and very important to Charles. She has volunteered at his elementary school and consistently monitors his work. He, in turn, helps her with the care of his brother, since she is not healthy and suffers from arthritis.

Charles works very hard. His eighth-grade teachers describe him as someone who "will do well. He is personable, a charmer. He tries hard to succeed." Charles dreams about becoming an engineer. In talking about his grades in elementary school, Charles discussed how he was working to get them higher: "I'm gonna get them higher. I have to get all As. . . . It is 'cause good grades I can get to a better college." When asked what he planned on doing in high school, Charles responded, "Keep my grades in the straight A department and work hard, hard, and hard." Charles is focused on the future and on the need to avoid fights and gangs. As he describes: "If you act this way now, ain't no way the rest of your life is gonna end up good or something, ain't no jobs. . . . Have to go to crime you know. . . . End up in jail for a long time."

Things have not always been easy for Charles. He has always struggled with behavioral problems because he "feels the size of anger" and readily admits that he struggles to control himself. Discipline problems plagued him when he changed schools after moving in with his grandmother. But, as Charles describes, a fourth grade teacher helped him "turn around." She was "always there for me. When I first came in here, I had a real bad behavior problem. She turned me around. . . . She just did a whole bunch of things. She just told me what I need to get somewhere. She just helped me. . . . If she needed to be strict, then she was. . . . That's what I liked about her." Charles visited this teacher's house and still talks to her often. He thinks he will keep in touch after grade school.

The first quarter in high school was rough, particularly in math and science, his favorite subjects. His algebra teacher "was too strict on my work. She makes us do unnecessary work, and if we don't show unnecessary work she gives us like zero and stuff." Despite spending a lot of time on homework "every night except Friday," he found it difficult. "It wouldn't be so hard if we didn't have to work all the problems by every step, but she wants to make sure we know how to do it." His difficulty in math increased when his teacher left early in the quarter and was replaced by a new teacher. At the end of the first quarter, his grades dropped to Ds, and he was failing two classes. Charles' grandmother reports that he decided to seek tutoring and started attending the tutoring program in the school. Tutoring helped. By the end of the semester, he managed to pass the two classes he was failing and received Cs in all of his other classes. In addition to the tutoring program, Charles started attending an after-school program in which he plays sports and takes part in other activities.

AFTER ACADEMIC DIFFICULTY, WHAT ARE THE CHANCES OF IMPROVING?

Systemwide Trends

What happens when students get into trouble during the transition to high school? How does the school respond? Do students get help? Based on students' responses to the 1994 surveys, it appears that many struggling students receive little support from their schools. For example, Chicago tenth graders are much less likely than eighth graders to say their teachers believe they can do well and have high expectations that students can complete homework and learn.[9] Tenth graders in Chicago are also less likely to report that they can turn to teachers with personal problems and that a high proportion of their teachers are willing to provide help if needed (see Section I). Lacking personal adult commitment and high expectations for academic achievement, students are more likely to have difficulty during the transition. The absence of these critical social supports also means that once students encounter academic difficulty, they will be less likely to recover.

In general, few students are able to react positively to difficulty and recover the way Charles did. Students who fail one core course in their first semester face a 71 percent chance that they will again fail at least one course in the second semester and a 37 percent chance that their performance will deteriorate to the point of failing more than half of

Percent Chance of Further Academic Difficulty or Recovery in Second Semester of Ninth Grade Based on First Semester Performance

Performance in First Semester of Ninth Grade	Outcome in Second Semester of Ninth Grade: Percent chance of failing one or more core courses or dropping out	Percent chance of failing 50 percent or more core courses or dropping out	Percent chance of failing 75 percent or more core courses or dropping out	Percent chance of recovery (i.e. getting fewer Fs than in first semester)
Failed no core courses	23	10	05	—
Failed one core course	71	37	18	29
Failed half to 3/4 of core courses	88	70	42	30
Failed 3/4 or more of core courses	96	92	84	16

Note: Core courses are English, mathematics, social studies, and science. First semester dropouts were not included in this analysis because their probability of recovery in the second semester is 0. The far right column contains the chances of an improvement over first semester performance for each category.

their courses. The chances of improvement are even poorer for students who fail more than one core course in the fall semester.

These findings suggest that, regardless of whether students fail only one course or many, Chicago high schools are generally unable to intervene and help failing students recover from a downward spiral. Indeed, even those students who pass all of their courses in the first semester are at risk; nearly one-quarter of these students will fail by the end of the year.

What Kinds of High Schools Have Better Recovery Rates?

The overall chances of students' improvement from failure in the first semester are poor, less than one in three. Schools, however, also vary in their recovery rates. In the 10 poorest performing high schools, only 15 percent of the students who fail at least one core course in the first semester pass all of their second semes-

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ter ninth-grade courses. In contrast, among the top high schools, the recovery rates approach 50 percent.

Not surprisingly, schools where students are more at risk of failing are also those schools with lower than average recovery rates. Such schools appear to be "organized for failure" in that they are ill-equipped to respond when students encounter difficulty.

Why are the Recovery Rates Better in Some Schools?

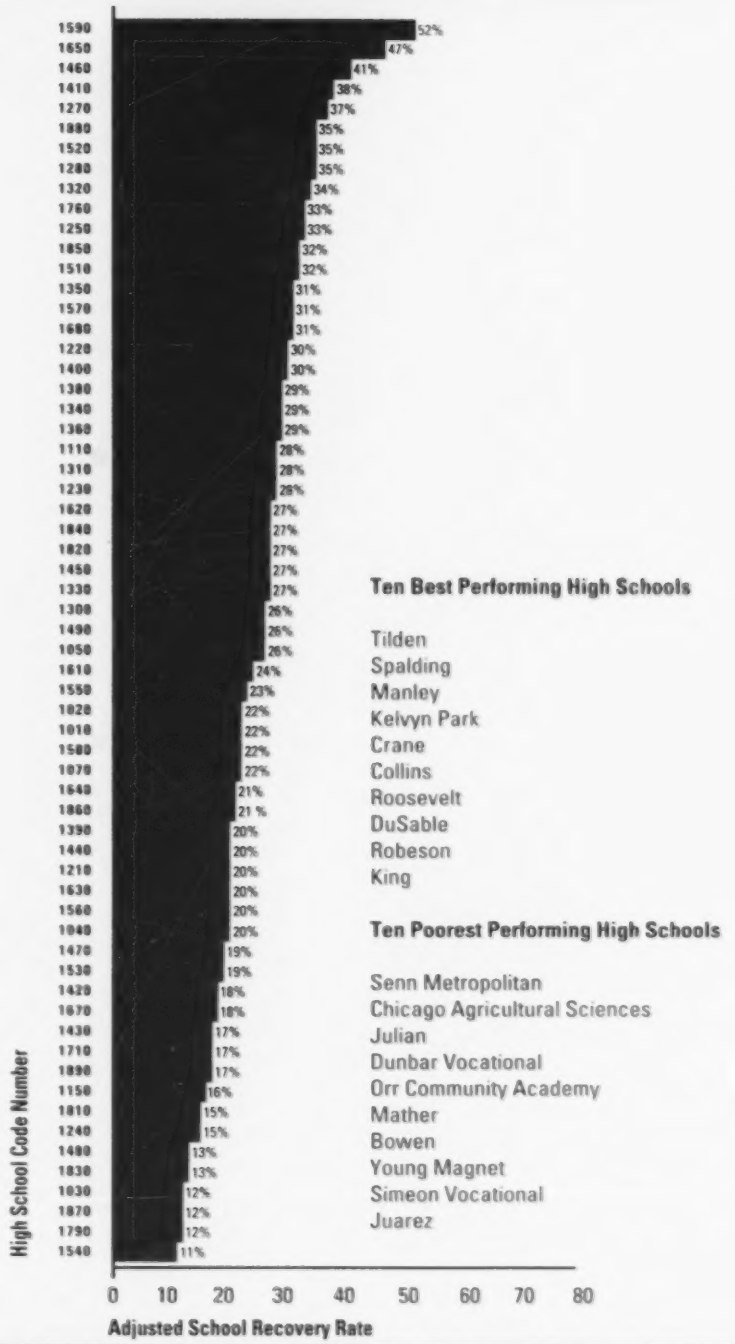
In looking for possible answers to this question, we examined the various indicators of the essential supports for student learning, developed both here and in our previous report, *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*. A number of school features stand out.[10] Better recovery rates are found in schools where teachers report:

- Inclusive, facilitative principal leadership focused on student learning and
- High levels of collegial scrutiny of teaching practice, intensive staff development, and active efforts to engage new colleagues in the school's mission.

In general, better recovery rates are found in schools where there are strong trusting relationships among teachers and with their school's principal. These are places where adults are working cooperatively together to advance the education of children.

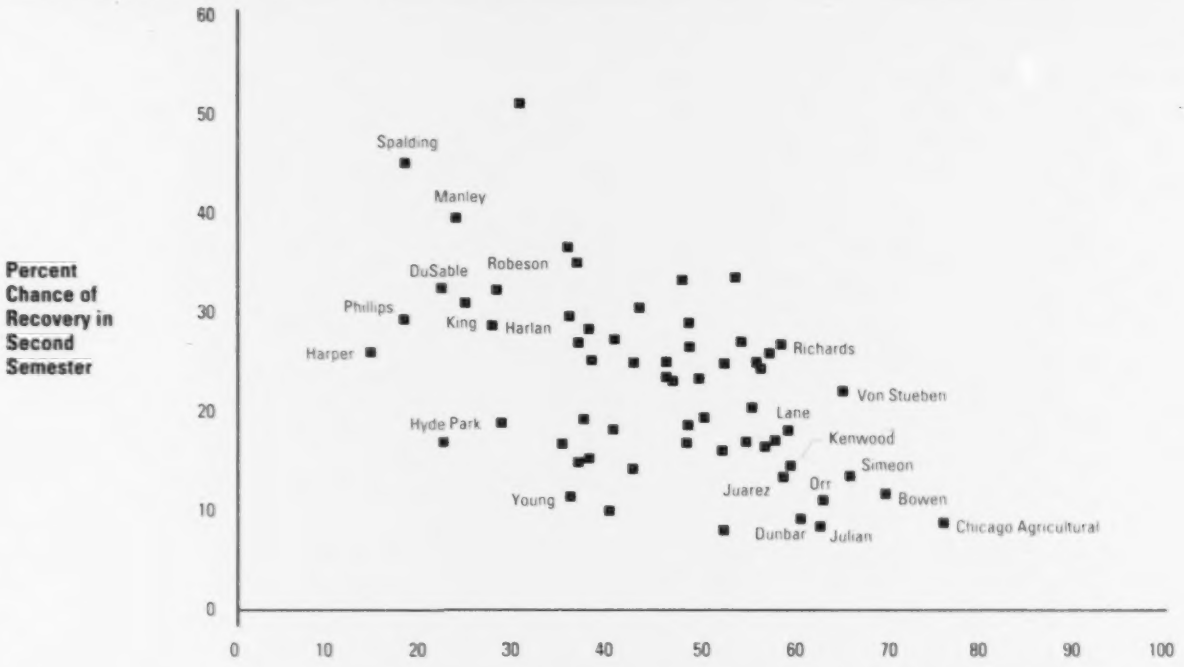
On balance, one needs to be cautious in interpreting exploratory data analyses of this sort. Statistical relationships do not necessarily imply causation. Since these statistical results, however, are quite consistent with school observations from the Consortium's study of teaching and

Chance of Recovery from Failing a Course in First Semester, Ninth Grade (Adjusted for Different Types of Students Enrolled)



Note: "Recovery" is defined as the percent chance of not failing a course second semester, given at least one course failure in the first semester.

School Recovery and Failure Rates
A Negative Relationship



learning and with personal student accounts from the Student Life in High Schools Project, they have added credibility. Taken together, this body of statistical and field research evidence supports the general conclusion presented here. Schools vary in their recovery rates, and differences in the ways schools are organized contribute to this in important ways.

We note that the relationships above are weaker for students who encountered serious academic difficulty (i.e., failing three-quarters or more of their courses) during the first semester of high school. Since no Chicago high school is doing especially well with these students, we have less information about what might work better for them. Interestingly, personalism (the extent to which teacher/student relationships are close and personal) is not related to recovery from failure. This result follows the general pattern seen throughout this report: Personalism uncoupled from strong support for academic work is not effective in engaging students in the school and its academic mission.

These findings indicate that strong, collaborative working relationships among teachers who are focused on student learning help create an environment in which students can get back on track after initially faltering. Unfortunately, as reported in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*, most Chicago high schools have a very weak base of these social resources. This suggests that substantial improvements in student engagement in high schools may require substantial changes in the work of high school teachers. Without institutional change, adding new programs may only be marginally effective.

Besides searching the survey results for clues about why some schools have better recovery rates, we decided to take a closer look at a Chicago high school which has a better than average recovery rate while serving very disadvantaged students.[11] We interviewed the principal and staff at Manley to get a better understanding about their efforts to break the pattern of academic failures that is endemic to Chicago's high schools. This brief account offers a concrete example of how one school establishes structures and policies to support students.[12]

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Manley High School: Deliberate Attempts to Break the Cycle of Failure

Manley is a relatively small high school, with roughly 250 students in the freshman class and 711 students overall. It is located in North Lawndale, on the west side of Chicago. The building is attractive and the halls are calm. Upon entering the building, one is likely to notice that many students are wearing uniforms. Indeed, all students are required to participate in the school's ROTC program during their freshman year, and many continue in that program afterwards. An additional defining quality are Manley's four "small schools" for tenth through twelfth graders, each of which has a particular vocational emphasis.

As we saw earlier, Manley appears to do better than average with the disadvantaged students it serves. Its success can be explained by a wide range of factors, none more important than the commitment of the principal, the staff, Manley's students, and their families. As one talks with those at the school, however, it becomes clear that several structures and programs also may play an important role.

When asked what might account for the relatively low rates of failure, Katherine Flanagan, the school's principal, places primary emphasis on their use of block scheduling. For the past several years, all students at Manley have enrolled in classes that last twice the normal time, but for only half a year. In general, students take three major subjects a semester, so they may be able to focus their attention better. For example, students might take math in the first semester and English in the second. This strategy has several advantages. As the principal related during an interview:

A student making the transition from elementary to high school and having to face six or seven classes and be accountable for those classes every single day is just overwhelming to them. Sometimes insurmountable. . . . Once they begin to say, "I can't hack this," they're gone, because the expectations of a high school teacher are different from the expectations of an elementary teacher.

By creating double periods, block scheduling also provides more time for the teacher to work closely with students. Teachers can begin by lecturing, Flanagan explained, and still have time "to do cooperative learning and Paideia and all of those types of things where they can interact with kids more." Many teachers also take some time at the end of class to get students started on their homework and to provide additional assistance. A further and not incidental benefit is that this scheduling can quiet the building down by limiting the number of transitions between classes.

The design of the block scheduling was changed slightly this year as a result of the heightened importance of the Illinois Goals Assessment Program (IGAP). Since these tests are taken in March, they put students who began their English or math courses in the second semester at a disadvantage. Under the new system, all students take all six of their subjects on Mondays, half of their subjects on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the other half on Wednesdays and Fridays. This structure aims to preserve some of the advantages of the block scheduling. It is worth noting, however, that in adjusting the program to accommodate testing, some advantages have been lost. Students must divide their attention across six subjects each semester, rather than concentrate well on three.

Another relatively unique structure at Manley is the ROTC program. All entering students participate during their freshman year. One of the guidance counselors explained that the ROTC program can help foster positive character traits which serve students well in high school. Since all students pass through a distinctive program, this may help to create a common bond among students and develop a sense of attachment to the school.

A variety of other programs and practices also are designed to lower the number of courses freshmen fail. For example, if a student fails two or more classes, the guidance department gets involved and, to the extent possible, the school community representative visits the student's home to meet with the family. Also there are tutoring programs after school, but these are difficult for some students to attend due to safety concerns: How will they get home if they stay at the school and miss their bus?

Manley offers a six-week summer program for entering ninth graders to prevent course failure and dropping out. The program's goal is to acquaint Manley freshmen with the school before the year begins. The curriculum

emphasizes both fun activities and basic skills. To further support students, especially those struggling to pass courses, the school also provides Saturday classes. If a student fails a class, he or she can take a half-credit course on Saturdays.

It is evident that Manley offers a range of programs and policies aimed at supporting student success in high school. As Katherine Flanagan explains, these efforts all share a common theme, consistent with the school's commitment: "Take students where they are and bring them up."

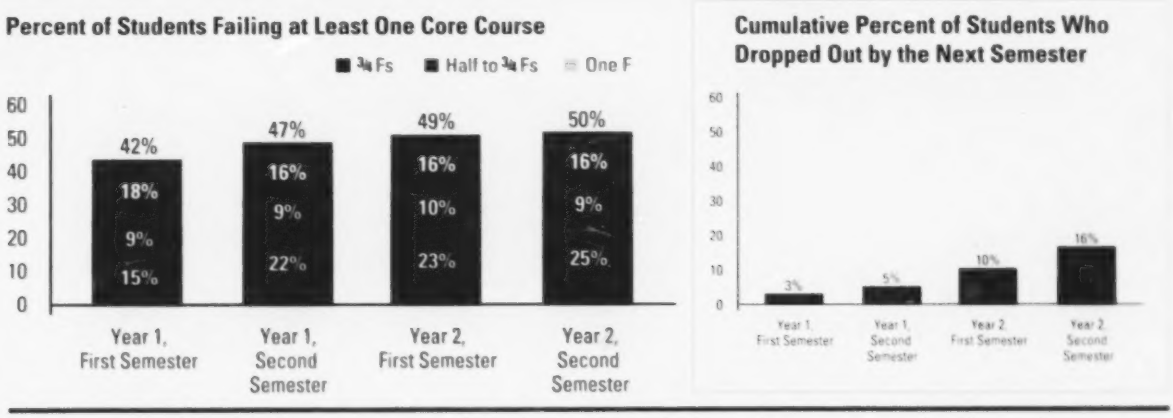
WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE TRANSITION: THE SECOND YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL

By the end of ninth grade, almost half of the Chicago Public Schools' entering freshman class of 1992 either failed one or more core courses or dropped out of school completely. Given this state of affairs, we decided to look at whether the situation improves after the ninth grade.

The data for the second year of high school continue to paint a disturbing portrait of failure in the Chicago Public Schools. Again, we see low recovery rates and a continuing pattern of risk, even for those students who remain in school. If, indeed, the problem of the school transition was concentrated among one group of students who entered high school, had trouble, and then left, we might expect that grade failure rates would decline over time. In fact, the opposite is true. By the end of the second year in high school (1993-94), 10 percent of those entering ninth grade in 1992 had already dropped out.[13] Of those who remained, nearly 50 percent failed at least one core course in their fourth semester, and 34 percent failed half or more of their courses. The failure rate is actually higher at the end of tenth grade than it was in the first semester of ninth grade.

Throughout this report, we have drawn on student survey results. Given that the students who were surveyed persisted to the end of the tenth grade, one might expect these students' characterizations of their schools to be at least somewhat positive, in that many of the academically weakest students already dropped out or were chronically absent (and probably did not fill out the survey). In this light, it is disturbing that survey results show that more than half the tenth-grade students are not very engaged in their coursework and sense less support by their teachers than eighth-grade students do. These

Fewer Students, More Courses Failed
First Four Semesters of High School



Note: For each of the first four semesters of high school, this graph shows the proportion of students who were enrolled at the beginning of the semester and failed one core course (English, mathematics, social studies, and science), half to three-quarters of their core courses, or who failed three-quarters or more of their core courses or dropped out. The students who left school each semester are represented in the graph on the right, which shows the cumulative dropout rate. The cumulative dropout rate was calculated by dividing the number of dropouts in this and previous semesters by the number of enrolled students plus the number of dropouts from previous semesters.

findings, along with the negative reports provided by high school teachers about school leadership and professional working relations and practices,[14] point to work environments for both adults and students that are often not engaging and largely organized for failure. In total, these data suggest a strong link between course failure and the nature of high school environments.

Shelley: A Transition Success Story

Shelley, an African-American adolescent from the south side, experienced a successful transition to high school. Shelley was an average student in her elementary school. She consistently received Bs and Cs. Her elementary school teacher described her as a conscientious worker: "She'll succeed and do well. She displays a lot of school spirit and showmanship...reliable and honest."

Shelley's mother and father are very involved in their child's education. Shelley's mother is always linking her daughter's present activities to her goal of being a doctor by having her volunteer at the hospital in which her mother works, going over medical books together, and going to the library together. Her mother is constantly inquiring about ways in which she can better prepare her child for college.

Shelley planned on attending a vocational high school on the south side, but decided to go to Oakdale after her mother managed to get her accepted; the family moved to the neighborhood. Oakdale is one of the better secondary schools in the city. In a university neighborhood, it has always had a reputation as academically oriented and supportive.

Shelley has done very well at Oakdale. She is pleased she is attending Oakdale rather than the school where she was originally scheduled to attend because her friends tell her that there is a lot of violence there. "I don't see any fighting up here," Shelley said. In addition, "Classes are better here because ...they try to make sure you do your work here. I think at (the other school) they don't care; that's what I think." She feels that teachers at Oakdale care. For example, "My division teacher...some kids in my division weren't doing good and then she was like, if you need help, you can come and talk to me...Because some kids...got Fs, and she was willing to help them if they needed help."

In her first semester of high school, Shelley received Bs in Algebra and English and an A in Spanish. Her worst course, in which she got a C, is history where "at first, I didn't do work, I didn't understand anything." Her average GPA in core courses increased from a 2.5 in eighth grade to a 3.0. She likes Oakdale very much and reports that her teachers are supportive and engaging. She thinks that she might be able to get into a higher level English class in her sophomore year. Shelley also is involved in cheerleading and seems to get along with other students.

Shelley's mom is equally pleased. She feels good about the way she was treated when she visited the high school. She likes the fact that teachers have phones in their classrooms and are accessible. When she attends parent events, she finds that teachers seem to know her daughter. She particularly liked attending the "day in the life of a student" orientation early in the school year where she walked through her daughter's schedule and met her teachers. Her main comment, when asked how schools could improve, is that *parents* of adolescents need to get into their children's education.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

Shelley has many things going for her that should help her succeed during the transition. She is highly motivated and has strong academic skills; her parents are very supportive; and she attends a high school that challenges her academically and supports both her and her family. When teachers, parents, and students work together like this and are focused on common goals, high school can be a period of tremendous growth and development as students move from adolescence to young adulthood.

Unfortunately, the story for many Chicago students is not like Shelley's. Rather, many students fail to thrive in the transition and do not receive the support and services necessary to recover from the difficulties they experience. They do not have access to teachers who care about them and who challenge them academically, and they do not participate in school events that reinforce their learning. Too many students are falling through the cracks and are not receiving the attention and intervention that will allow them to develop the academic and social skills necessary to cope with the increasing demands of high schools. Our analysis has demonstrated that the combination of early academic difficulty and lack of responsiveness on the part of students, families, and schools combine to place students at high risk of falling further and further behind and, ultimately, of dropping out.

Our findings highlight the importance of getting students off on the right foot early in high school. Early academic difficulty, particularly for students who enter high school academically or socially at risk, becomes a new obstacle to overcome. Indeed, early failure exacerbates a student's growing sense of alienation and precludes the possibility of gaining a sense of membership in the school and adopting the school's academic goals. This, in turn, may weaken the school's pull on students and enhance the attractiveness of gangs as alternative affiliations.

Failing in high school and dropping out are critical turns in a child's life. While some students who drop out later return to school, research has found that even those who later return are hampered for the rest of their lives.[15] When students fail courses and do not progress in a regular fashion through school, the system fails them in ways that have long-term implications. Indeed, course failure is symptomatic of a larger problem: Chicago high schools are too often places of lost opportunity. As we have seen throughout this report, even good students often do not experience Chicago high schools as positive environments which engage them in developing the social and academic skills that will allow them to attain their goals.

Our findings also make clear, however, that a focus on improving the transition to high school is not enough. Even students who pass all of their courses in the first semester remain at risk. The combination of low recovery and continuing risk means that by the end of tenth grade, course failure rates in the core courses are actually higher than in the first semester.

When looking at failure, it is natural to focus on individual students' responses and the characteristics they bring to school that lead to poor transitions—poor skills, low parental support for learning, stresses outside of school, and few coping skills in reaction to difficulty. But one of the most important findings of our analysis is that good academic skills and attendance do not necessarily mean that students will be able to do well in Chicago high schools. Even students who enter high school performing at grade level in mathematics and reading, and those who attend high school regularly face more than a 30 percent chance of failing a core course in the first semester. Thus, even capable students regularly fail. The pervasiveness of course failure underscores that, while the solution will surely require the effort and attention of individual students, families, and teachers, the problem cannot be attributed to the failure of any individual or group alone. Rather, it reflects a larger structural problem. Chicago high schools are currently organized in ways that undermine essential supports needed for student learning.

The overall picture that emerges from this analysis is one of broad-based institutional failure in response to students' needs—a failure to help students succeed during the transition, a failure to help students recover when they encounter difficulty, and more broadly, a failure to encourage students to form strong attachments to their schools and build upon their strengths. Unless these deep-seated problems are addressed, the future for many students will be in jeopardy.

Section IV

A Closer Look at Low-Achieving Elementary Schools

By Anthony S. Bryk

In the spring of 1995, the Illinois State Board of Education identified very low-achieving schools all across the state. This list included 104 Chicago elementary schools, more than 20 percent of the system.[1] It is clear that overall student achievement is well below national norms in these schools. Beyond this, however, much less appears certain. While many suggestions have been offered about how to improve these schools, the evidence to warrant these various proposals remains unclear.[2]

For this reason we decided to take a closer look at the low-achieving elementary schools in terms of the essential supports for student learning developed by the Chicago Public Schools (CPS).[3] Four (of the five) essential supports—school leadership, parent and community partnerships, professional development and collaboration, and student-centered learning climate—have been the primary focus of the last two Consortium reports. (The fifth essential support, a quality instructional program, is the focus of our next report, to be released later this year.) Does this framework ch is also the suggested basis for the annual school improvement plan, *School Improvement Plan for Advancing Academic Achievement*,[4] help us to understand better the needs of these schools?

WHAT KINDS OF SCHOOLS ARE ON THE LIST?

The Consortium maintains a broad base of descriptive information on Chicago schools in terms of student and faculty composition, and census data about school neighborhoods and students' home neighborhoods. We compared the low-achieving elementary schools with other CPS elementary schools with respect to these demographic and community characteristics. Several key differences stand out:

- The overwhelming majority of low-achieving elementary schools, 78 percent, serve predominantly African-American students (i.e., 85 percent or more African-American enrollment). This contrasts with the rest of the CPS elementary schools, where only 34 percent have predominantly African-American enrollments. This does not mean, however, that most African-American schools are low-achieving schools. Of the 226 African-American schools in the city, a little over a third are considered low-achieving.
- Low-achieving schools serve more low-income students (85 percent versus 69 percent in other CPS schools).
- Low-achieving schools have higher student mobility (43 percent versus 32 percent).
- Low-achieving schools are likely to be larger. Only 6 percent of these elementary schools enroll fewer than 350 students, compared to 24 percent for the rest of the CPS.
- Low-achieving schools are concentrated on the south and west sides of the city.

In short, low-achieving elementary schools are predominantly poor and racially isolated schools in African-American neighborhoods. These schools also share two unfavorable organizational characteristics—they tend to be large and serve highly mobile student populations.

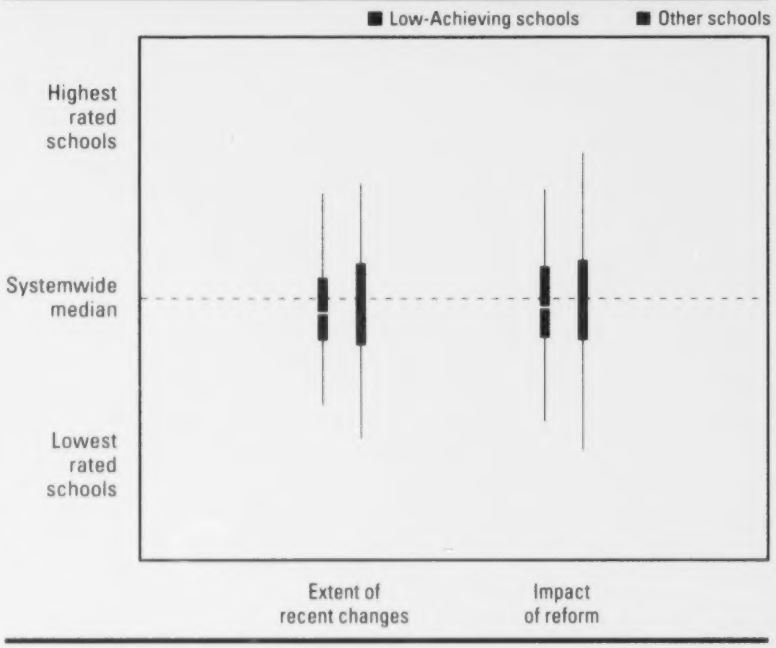
We now turn to the Consortium's student and teacher survey data from spring 1994 to explore the relative organizational strengths and weaknesses of these low-achieving schools. We have survey data from 61 elementary schools on the list and comparative information from 205 other elementary schools that are not on the list.[5] This sample of 266 schools forms the basis of the analyses that follow.

ARE THESE SCHOOLS CASUALTIES OF REFORM?

The opening section of *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock* examines teachers' views about the changes in their schools and the impact of reform "over the last three years" (i.e., from 1991 through 1994). Teachers evaluated whether their schools have gotten better, not changed or gotten worse in terms of 13 different features of their work lives, their relationships with students, parents, and the community, and student behavior and academic performance. (The same set of 13 questions also was asked about the impact of reform.) In order to summarize teachers' views in each school, we combined all of the teacher responses to each of these two sets of 13 questionnaire items to form school indicators of "recent changes" and the "impact of reform." We now use the two summary indicators to compare low-achieving elementary schools to other CPS elementary schools.

Basically, low-achieving elementary schools look very much like other Chicago elementary schools in terms of teacher reports about recent changes and the impact of reform. The summary on this topic, offered in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock,* applies equally well to the low-achieving group. Slightly less than half the teachers reported positive developments between 1991 and 1994. Teachers in this group noted constructive changes in most areas, including student achievement. About 37 percent indicate little or no change has occurred in their schools, and less than a fifth report change for the worse. Teachers in the latter group generally report that student behavior, academic performance, and how students get along with other students has gotten worse. They also do not see any improvements in their work conditions or in their relationship to parents and the community.

Effects of Reform
Distribution of School Indicators: Elementary Schools



With respect to the impact of Chicago school reform, *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock* found that almost half the teachers judge that the reform had at least some positive impact on their school. Thirty-six percent report no impact, and 19 percent suggest the reform had some negative impact on their school. The latter group of teachers report that, among other things, school reform had a negative impact on student achievement. Again, teachers in low-achieving schools offer reports very similar to those generally provided across the system.

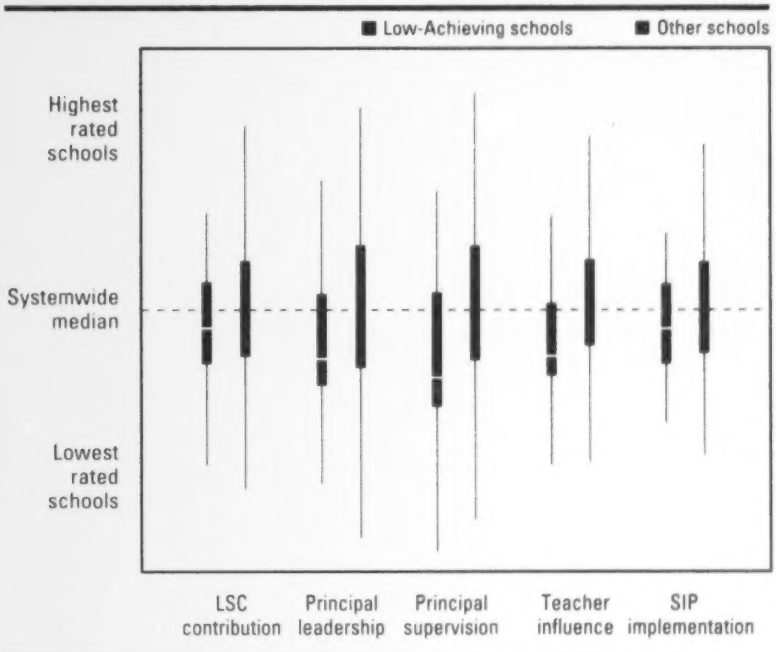
Thus, while low-achieving elementary schools clearly have serious student achievement problems, only a minority of teachers believe that they have been caused by reform. This suggests that the problems in low-achieving schools are not new. In all likelihood, they predate the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988 and may even trace their roots back to a segregated Chicago Public Schools system.

EXAMINING THE ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS

Assessment of School Leadership

The Consortium's 1994 surveys asked teachers to evaluate: their Local School Council's (LSC's) contribution to school improvement; whether their principal is leading change in their building by encouraging instructional improvements, setting high standards, and engaging teachers and parents in these efforts; whether teachers have influence in school decision making; and the effectiveness of the school's improvement planning process and its likely impact on student learning. From these individual teacher reports we

School Leadership
Distribution of School Indicators: Elementary Schools



generated five school indicators—LSC contribution, principal leadership, principal supervision of instruction,[6] teacher influence, and SIP implementation—that summarize teachers' views about the quality of leadership in their school communities.

In general, teachers in low-achieving elementary schools offer somewhat weaker reports about school leadership.[7] While these differences are modest for LSC contribution and SIP implementation, they are relatively large for teachers' involvement in school decision making. In the typical low-achieving school, only some teachers are involved in decision-making committees, most report little or no influence over school matters, and most feel uncomfortable voicing any concerns they may have.[8] This stands in sharp contrast, for example, to the schools in which teachers' ratings place them in the top quarter of elementary schools on teacher influence. In these schools, half or more of the teachers are involved in decision-making committees; teachers feel very comfortable voicing concerns and report a fair amount of influence over school affairs.

These results indicate that in many low-achieving elementary schools, the faculty as a group has relatively little influence. Curiously, these reports occur even though teachers in these schools are spending similar amounts of time out of class on various school committees (LSC, Professional Personnel Advisory Committee, and other local school committees) and attending various school events. In low-achieving schools, the average teacher reports spending 6.8 hours per week in these activities; the comparable figure for elementary schools across the system is 6.3 hours.

According to teachers, principals in low-achieving schools bear some responsibility for the current state of affairs. These teachers tend to offer weaker accounts about both facilitative leadership and instructional supervision. They are, for example, less likely to describe their principal as communicating a clear vision for the school, setting high standards for teaching, encouraging new methods of instruction, and embracing shared decision making. They also tend to indicate that the principal is less likely to visit their classrooms and monitor instruction. The overall picture is one of weak leadership across the board—less attention to instruction and less effort to bring pepple together around a vision of school improvement.

Even so, as the results which follow show, the difficulties in low-achieving elementary schools appear to entail more than just a problem of principal leadership and supervision. In many of these schools, teachers do not share a professional commitment to advance student learning, are not especially interested in teaching in these schools and trying to improve them, and do not trust each other. In short, while there may well be a leadership problem, there is also a larger problem with the faculty culture that may significantly impede future improvement efforts.

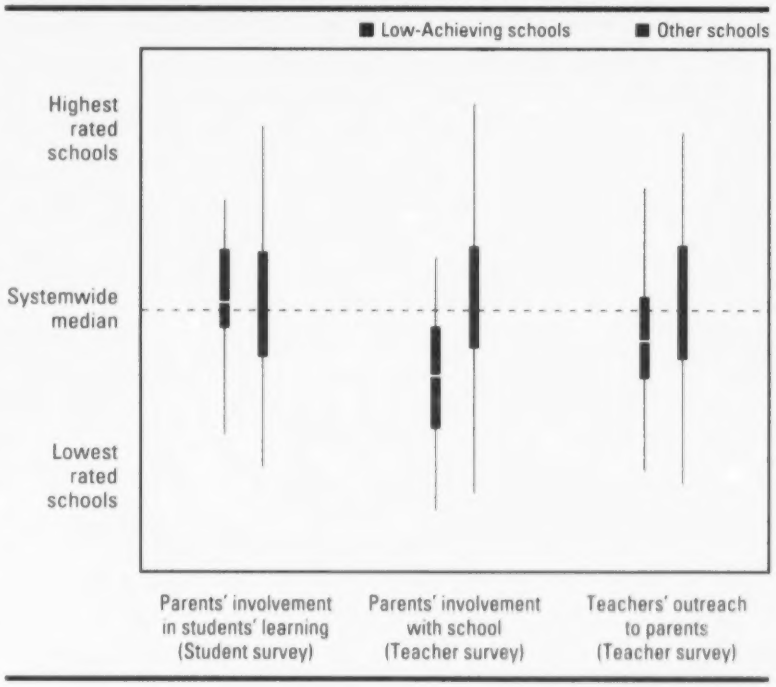
Parental Involvement

Given that low-achieving elementary schools serve very disadvantaged communities, we might expect less parental involvement. Interestingly, there are no differences between the low-achieving schools and other Chicago schools in terms of students' reports about their own parents' involvement in their learning. Students in these schools, when compared to those in the comparison group, are equally likely to indicate that the

parents and other adults living with them "encourage them to work hard at school," "praise them for doing well," and "check to see if they have done their homework." Again, the summary from *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock* applies. Only about half the sixth-, eighth- and tenth-grade students could be classified as receiving strong or moderate support from their parents.[9]

Shifting to teachers' reports, a different picture emerges. Here again we find weaker accounts. Many teachers in low-achieving elementary schools appear reticent to reach out to parents and work with them around meeting the needs of students.[10] Not surprisingly, teachers also report only *limited* or *minimal* involvement on the part of parents in return.[11] According to teachers, while most parents in these school pick up report cards, only about half attend parent-teacher conferences, fewer attend other school events, and virtually none volunteer to help out. Thus, another important resource for improving student learning—the reciprocal commitment of staff and parents to collaborate in supporting students' learning—is weaker or, in some cases, totally lacking in these schools.

Parental Involvement
Distribution of School Indicators: Elementary Schools



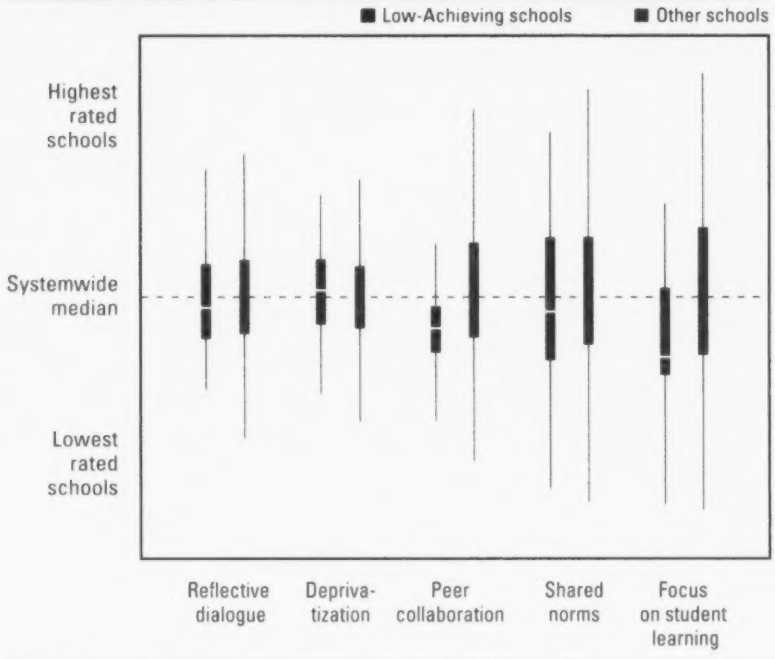
Professional Community and Orientation

Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock focused considerable attention on teachers' orientations toward their work and the extent to which their schools were cultivating a collective focus and shared responsibility for student learning. We carefully scrutinized developments in this area because of the rapidly escalating public demands that schools seek world-class standards of attainment for all students. It is broadly assumed that major improvements in instruction will be required and that, as part of this, the work conditions of teachers also must change. Specifically, unless schools become more active learning environments for both teachers and students, it is unlikely that these new, higher standards will be attained on any large scale.

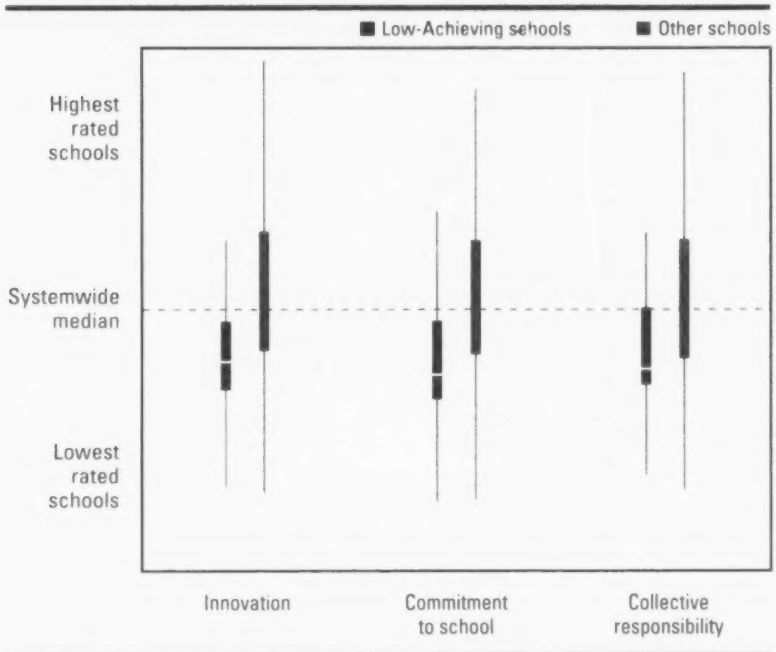
Low-achieving elementary schools look like other Chicago schools on some of our indicators of professional community and orientation. For example, the two groups of schools report similar amounts of teacher conversation with colleagues about their work (reflective dialogue indicator); in ratings of opportunities for team teaching, peer coaching, and sharing instructional methods (deprivatization indicator); and in shared norms about what students should learn and how they should behave.[12]

Reports about peer collaboration and focus on student learning, however, provide a very different view of these schools. Almost 75 percent of the low-achieving elementary schools are below the systemwide median on the collaboration measure. The typical teacher in a low-achieving school indicates that she does not coordinate instruction with other grades or collaborate with colleagues to make the school run effectively.[13] Similarly, about a quarter of the teachers in low-achieving schools disagree with all of the items that compose the focus on student learning scale: "This school sets high standards for academic performance;" "This school has well defined learning expectations;" and "When making important decisions, this school always focuses on what is best for student learning." Another third of the teachers, while agreeing with some of the items in the scale, disagree with others and do not strongly endorse any of the positive

Professional Community
Distribution of School Indicators: Elementary Schools



Professional Orientation
Distribution of School Indicators: Elementary Schools



statements. Thus, a majority of teachers in low-achieving elementary schools offer very weak reports about their school's standards of academic performance and decisions that affect student learning.[14]

This pattern appears even more pronounced when we look at teachers' orientations toward innovation, their commitment to their current school, and collective responsibility for student learning. About 75 percent of the low-achieving elementary schools are below the systemwide median on each of these three indicators. Given the very low student achievement in these schools, one might expect an openness on the part of teachers to try something different. Yet teachers' responses run exactly opposite to these expectations. They tend to report that only some of their colleagues are eager to try new ideas, and they do not feel that teachers generally have a "can do" attitude. Teachers do not believe that they are strongly encouraged to "stretch and grow" and "learn new ideas." In short, even though it seems fairly clear that current practices are not working for most teachers, only a small portion are positively oriented to want change.

Almost 60 percent of the teachers in low-achieving elementary schools offer mixed or negative accounts of their commitment to their current school. While they may claim loyalty to the school, they would "prefer to teach somewhere else" and probably "would not recommend the school to parents seeking a place for their child." Comparable reports arise from less than 40 percent of the teachers in comparison schools.

Similarly, in terms of the questionnaire items that comprise the collective responsibility indicator, teachers in low-achieving elementary schools typically report that only about half or less of their colleagues "feel responsible to help each other," "take responsibility for improving the school," and "work together to do what is best for kids."[15] While

some teachers in these schools are concerned and committed to improvement, these sentiments do not characterize the overwhelming majority. This is a very different pattern from the top quarter of Chicago elementary schools, where more than 70 percent of the teachers report that most of their colleagues have a strong sense of responsibility for helping each other, improving the school, and setting high standards for themselves.[16]

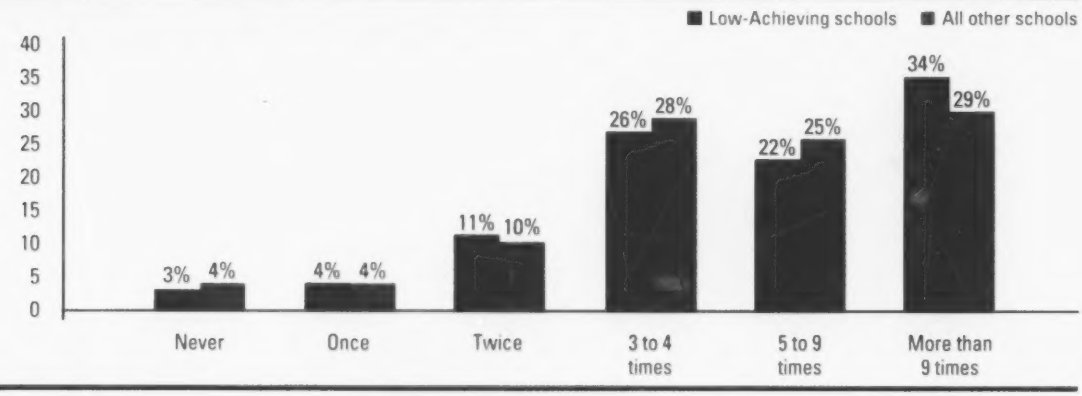
Finally, we looked at teachers' involvement in professional development activity both inside and outside the school. Teachers in low-achieving elementary and comparison schools are participating in both school-based and external professional development at the same rates. This means that teachers in low-achieving schools have at least some access to new ideas about improving their school, but for the time being at least, this does not appear to have had much influence on improvements in student learning.

This finding represents an apparent contradiction. Teachers appear to be significantly engaged in professional development activities, yet at the same time they report little orientation to innovate in their classrooms. This resembles another apparent contradiction reported earlier in this section. Teachers in low-achieving schools are spending a fair amount of time on schoolwide committees and activities, yet they do not report much influence over school affairs. Taken together, these accounts of professional development and school committees suggest an almost "ceremonial" approach to school improvement, where teachers are undertaking the "right activities" but "not much really comes of it."

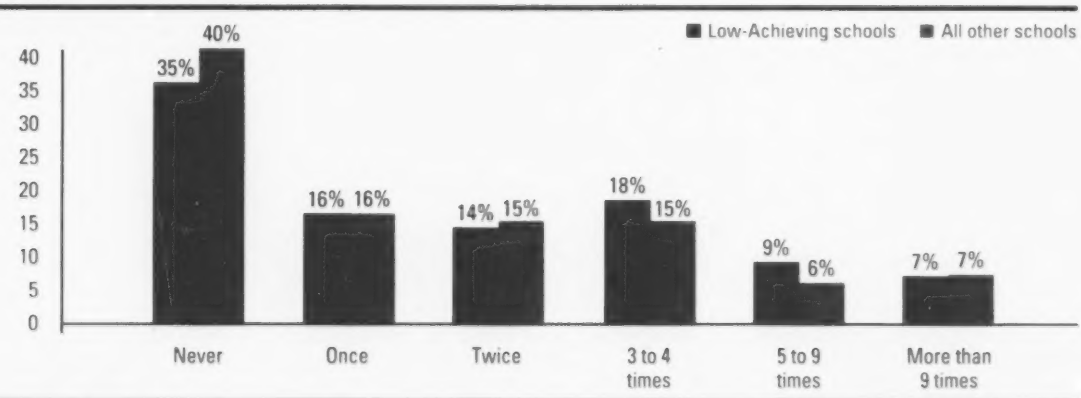
TYING IT TOGETHER: COOPERATIVE ADULT RELATIONS, PROGRAM COHERENCE, AND SOCIAL TRUST

A complex and troubling picture of the low-achieving elementary schools is beginning to emerge from the teacher reports. There is a con-

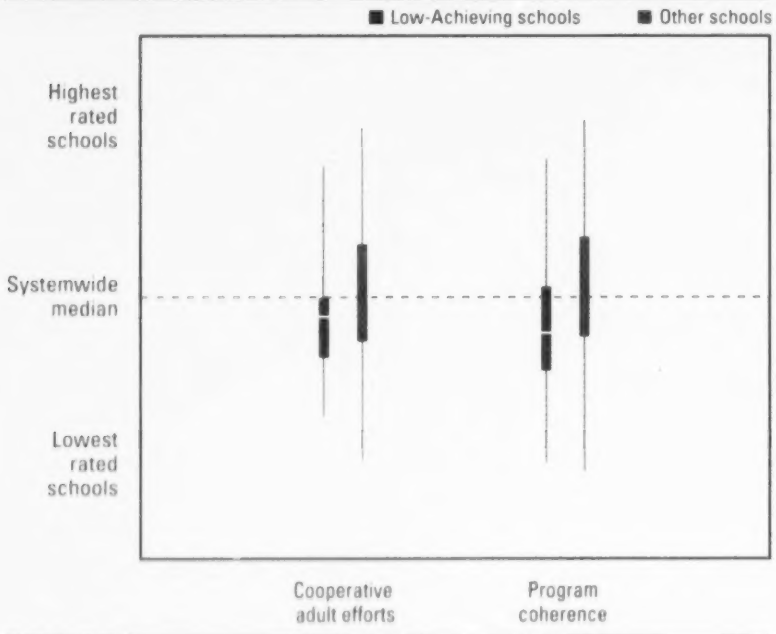
Frequency of School-Based Professional Development, 1993–94
Elementary School Teachers



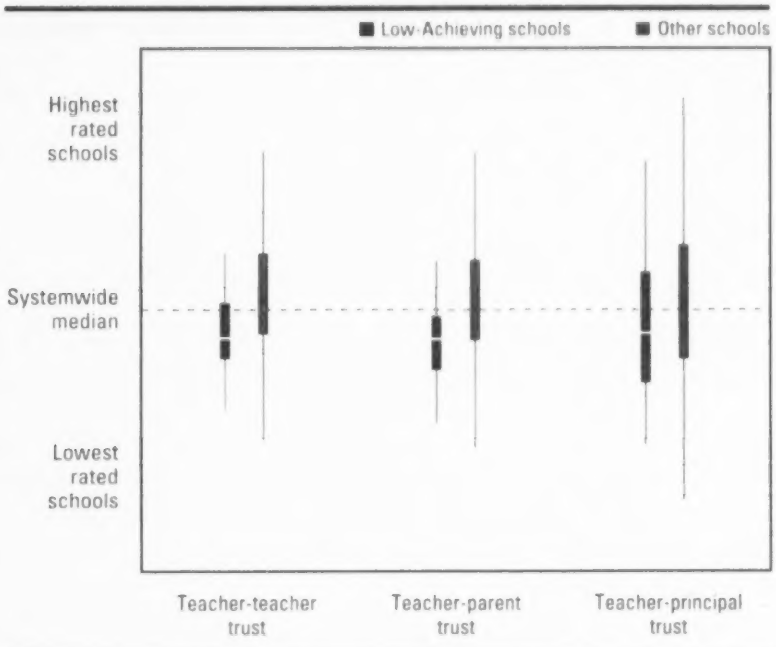
Frequency of External Professional Development, 1993–94
Elementary School Teachers



Cooperative Adult Relations and Program Coherence
Distribution of School Indicators: Elementary Schools



Social Trust
Distribution of School Indicators: Elementary Schools



siderable amount of professional development activity occurring, and teachers are talking with at least some colleagues inside the school and sharing practices with them. The school as a whole, however, is not working. This shows up very clearly in the overall composite indicator of cooperative adult efforts toward school improvement, developed in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*. Schools that are high on this overall indicator combine effective local school governance, good parental involvement, and positive professional community and orientation. Unfortunately, few low-achieving schools fit this description. In general, the level of cooperative adult effort tends to be very low. Almost 80 percent of the low-achieving elementary schools are below the systemwide median.

Not surprisingly, unfocused improvement initiatives also characterize low-achieving schools. With respect to program coherence, teachers in low-achieving elementary schools typically say they do not feel that "the school follows up to make sure that its programs are working," and "[I] cannot see real continuity across the various programs running in the school."[17]

Similarly, we find much weaker reports about social trust among teachers and between teachers and parents in low-achieving elementary schools. Here again, almost 75 percent of these schools are below the systemwide median on these two measures. These numbers translate into pervasive negative reports about the level of trust, caring, and respect across the school community. For example, in many of these schools, a majority of teachers report that they "do not trust their colleagues" and that most teachers "don't feel good about parents' support for their work."

The summary observation offered in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock* is especially relevant for low-achieving schools. The social

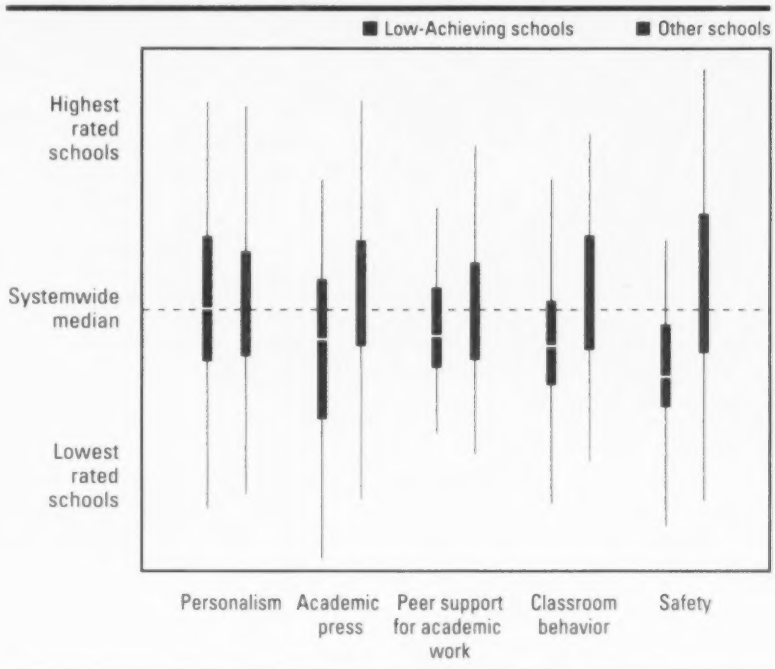
fabric among members of a school community is foundational for school improvement. In places where teachers report distrust and disrespect, both within the staff and between staff and parents, sustained, positive organizational change is highly unlikely. Unfortunately, this appears to be an apt description for many of the low-achieving elementary schools.

Before moving on to examine students' experiences in their school environments, a caveat is in order. The patterns described so far represent a general description of the kinds of problems prevalent in low-achieving elementary schools. They are not, however, a precise organizational diagnosis for any single school. Some schools, for example, are not low on all of the indicators considered so far. For example, 20 percent of the low-achieving elementary schools are above the systemwide median on the composite indicator of cooperative adult relations. While the types of analyses presented here help to identify some concerns that are shared by many low-achieving schools, one cannot be sure about what is occurring in any given school without extensive direct observations.

Student-Centered Learning Climate

Three of the indicators—safety, classroom behavior, and peer support for academic work—focus on students' descriptions of the attitudes and behaviors of their friends and classmates. The reports from students in low-achieving elementary schools tend to be fairly negative and are further validated by teacher reports summarized in Section I about school disruptions. The average safety rating among low-achieving schools is much lower than that of other schools. In fact, the average low-achieving school would fall in the bottom 25 percent of other CPS schools. Students in low-achieving schools are much more likely to say that they feel only *somewhat safe* or *not safe* around the school, particularly in the hallways and bathrooms and outside around the school.

Student-Centered Learning Climate
Distribution of School Indicators: Elementary Schools



Differences in students' ratings of classroom behavior are also quite substantial. In general, students in low-achieving elementary schools are less likely to report that "students help each other in class" and are more likely to say that "classes are often disrupted by other students." Regarding peer support for academic work, low-achieving schools rank well below other CPS schools. Students in low-achieving schools have fewer friends who "try hard to get good grades" and "think it is important to do their homework." In short, concerns about safety, student misbehavior and peer influence appear to be major issues in these schools.

In terms of students' reports about their teachers, the picture is a bit more complex but still equally troublesome. On one hand, there are only small differences between low-achieving and other schools on teacher personalism. Students in low-achieving elementary schools are almost as likely as their counterparts in other schools to endorse statements such as "teachers care about students," "notice when I am absent," and "are willing to help with personal problems." However, much weaker reports are offered about teachers' academic press. Nearly half of the low-achieving schools are in the bottom quartile on this indicator. The modal student response in these schools is one of *limited* to *moderate* academic press. Such students tend to report that, while teachers generally expect them to complete their work, only a few really care if they do it or not or are

willing to give extra help if students need it. Also, these students disagree with the statement, "When I work hard on school work, teachers praise my effort."

Taken together, these two indicators suggest a prevalence in low-achieving elementary schools of the disturbing pattern described in Section I. When positive student-teacher relations are uncoupled from a strong press toward academic work, schools are not effective in promoting students learning.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

In at least some low-achieving elementary schools, a weak principalship is clearly a problem. Teachers point directly to it in their comments about principal leadership and instructional supervision. They also indirectly implicate this in their statements about receiving little encouragement to "stretch and grow" and "learn new ideas." While there is a fair amount of individual professional development activity occurring, collective efforts anchored in shared commitments to improve student learning are lacking. Many teachers appear disengaged from the school's problems and have little trust in each other and the school's parents. Thus, the collective social resources for change in these school communities are very limited. A set of norms shared among adults, maintaining this dysfunctional status quo, appears well entrenched. To be sure, some low-achieving elementary schools do not meet the description just offered, but many probably do.

As we look across the diverse indicators discussed in this section, we begin to see some evidence of a breakdown of institutional norms. Teachers are getting along with their principals, but the principals are not really pressing for improvement. Similarly, teachers are getting along with students, but not really pressing academic work. Both students and teachers agree that student behavior is a problem, but developing students' social skill tends not to receive a high priority (this was one question in the scale on focus on student learning). Moreover, the general quality of relationships among teachers and parents is not strong, indicating weak social resources for improvement in the school community.

These findings describe school environments that are oriented toward maintaining the status quo. Simply adding more resources, more programs, more time, or more materials into these schools is unlikely to be effective. Moreover, it is not as if there are just one or two major issues to fix, such as, replacing the principal or offering more professional development. Rather, we are witnessing a more general institutional failure. These schools are not effective, self-guided institutions seeking to advance student learning and to be more responsive to their local communities. Fundamental changes are required, and strong, broad-based interventions are needed to catalyze such initiatives. Left to their own devices, it is unclear that many of these elementary schools have the human resources and collective will to improve.

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Interpretive Summary

This report has attempted to give voice to students' perceptions about their schools, the kinds of experiences they have within them, and how this, in turn, influences their engagement and effort. Our particular concern was whether Chicago schools afford a student-centered learning climate: one that is safe, orderly, and respectful, as well as academically challenging and personally nurturing. Past research indicates that such environments promote student learning.

A school climate that is personally supportive as well as academically challenging is crucial in Chicago and other large urban centers, where high percentages of students live in circumstances that are not especially supportive of school success. Many families and communities are stressed and fragmented, and, as a result, students may not receive the attention and guidance they need to do well in school. Consequently, school staff bear special responsibility if these students are to move forward.

A DYNAMIC INTERPLAY: PERSONALISM AND ACADEMIC PRESS

Of the various aspects of the learning climate considered in this report, students were most positive about their teachers. For example, the vast majority of sixth and eighth graders claimed that teachers listen to them, care about them, notice if they are absent, and generally take individual interest in them. Similarly, the overwhelming majority of eighth graders believe their teachers impart strong messages about the importance of academic effort and success.

A key finding in this regard is the interaction of teacher personalism and academic press in promoting engagement in learning. In looking across elementary schools, students tend to report higher levels of engagement when teachers demonstrate keen personal interest in them **and at the same time** press them toward academic work. In contrast, our analysis of the low-achieving elementary schools reveals that, while students rate these schools about the same as other schools with respect to personalism, few students perceive a strong press toward academic achievement.

These findings are consistent with a growing body of other research on both public and Catholic schools. Teachers who are friendly toward their students but do not demand serious academic effort are not helping students reach their full potential. While it is essential that teachers and principals treat students respectfully and model cooperative, caring behavior, by itself this does not foster academic development. Both policy makers and practitioners need to be mindful of the dynamic interaction of personalism and academic press as they fund, develop, and operate programs. Good schools maintain consistent expectations for high quality work in a context where students receive plenty of support.

SCHOOL SAFETY: A NEED FOR COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS

The priority that local school leadership has given to problems of safety and order, which we documented in our earlier report[1] and which have been recounted in *Catalyst*,[2] seems well placed. While there is evidence that conditions are improving,[3] students are telling us that more still needs to be done.

This appears especially true for students in primarily African-American schools. As a group, they are less likely than students in primarily Hispanic, mixed minority, or integrated schools to report feeling safe in and around the school. On balance, there is considerable variation in student safety reports among the African-American schools, with many of these schools being rated highly. The most distinctive characteristic of these highly rated African-American schools is that the adults are working cooperatively together on sus-

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tained school improvements. Principals, parents, and teachers are actively engaged with their community to make the school work for their students.

A significant finding regarding safety is how closely entwined students' sense of safety is with the neighborhood conditions surrounding the school. Elementary schools that students rate poorly on safety tend to be located in high-crime neighborhoods. Clearly, school staff cannot solve these problems alone. Schools need help in promoting safety from parents and their communities and other public and private social agencies. In the long run, the larger set of social problems affecting many Chicago communities must be addressed. Even though schools seek to offer students a safe haven, students' survey responses serve as a reminder of how difficult this can be in some contexts.

UNCLEAR ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR JUDGING EFFORT

One of our most puzzling findings is the seeming contradiction between students reports of working hard and perceiving strong academic press from their teachers, compared to reports from the same students about the actual amount of homework they do and how regularly they attend class. Despite the fact that the vast majority of tenth-grade students perceive strong messages from their teachers about the value of academic work, and report working to do their best in class, two-thirds also report doing an hour or less of homework per night. These same high school students are also frequently late, cut classes, and are absent.

Contradictions between perceptions and behavior raise questions about the standards students employ to assess effort and performance. How do they judge what teachers are asking them to do, and what are they actually doing? If students are spending little time on homework and their achievement is low, why do they believe their teachers are pressing them to work hard, and that they are doing their best? This pattern of responses suggests to us that the actual academic expectations for many students are very low. In fact, other research studies on inner-city schools have also documented this phenomenon.[4] Through their interactions with teachers and peers, students seem to have developed an understanding of school work that is far removed from any reasonable expectations about academic attainment. Although we do not have direct information on how students judge genuine academic competence in solving math problems, for example, or writing a good essay, the evidence we offer here calls into question the overall standards conveyed throughout the Chicago public school system about what serious academic performance actually entails.

HIGH SCHOOLS: A CASE OF INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE

The most negative reports of learning climate come from tenth-grade students. Compared to sixth- and eighth-grade students, significantly fewer tenth-grade students view their teachers as personally concerned about them or pushing them toward high academic achievement. Similarly, fewer tenth-grade students claim that many of their friends make a strong effort to do well in school. They are also less likely to feel safe inside and outside the school. We noted as well that on several questions where we have comparative information from other urban centers, Chicago tenth graders often are less positive than tenth-grade students elsewhere.

These results suggest important differences in the learning climates between elementary and high schools. Elementary schools are smaller, more intense learning communities, where teachers have the opportunity to get to know their students. As students move on to high schools, they experience a sea change in their environment. High schools are much larger, more impersonal, and make more complex academic and social demand on students.

The records on absenteeism and course failure document shocking levels of disengagement among tenth graders. Literally thousands of tenth-grade students are absent for a month, two months, or more each year. For many students, being absent simply fades into dropping out of school.

Moreover, course failure in high school is pervasive and not limited to any particular group of students or schools. During the first semester of ninth grade, 42 percent of the tenth-grade students failed at least one course in English, mathematics, social studies, or science. While students who are absent frequently and who have weak basic skills are most likely to fail, other "good students" also experience failure. For instance, among the strongest elementary school graduates, i.e., those who were in the top quartile on the reading and math sections of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), over 25 percent failed a course in the first semester of high school. Similarly, more than a quarter of the students who were absent five or fewer days in the first semester also failed a course. Even in the ten best-perform-

ing schools, 10 percent of the students failed half their classes during first semester.

Perhaps the most discouraging news is that students continue to fail even as they move into tenth grade. At the end of their second year, after 10 percent of the students already have dropped out, 50 percent of the remaining students still fail at least one core course. This failure rate is actually worse than for the first semester of high school.

These data document that thousands of high school students are falling through the cracks every day. The students' stories in Section III reveal a myriad of circumstances that interfere with student productivity: negative peer pressure, stress of family disintegration, poor preparation for high school, inappropriate behavior, language barriers, and the difficulties experienced by students and parents in communicating with teachers.

On the positive side, some schools are making significant strides to stem the slide into failure. In a dozen high schools, the chance of failure actually lessens in the second semester of ninth grade. Such successes do not happen by chance: some schools are making sustained and serious efforts to combat academic failure. As we documented at Manley High School, for example, school staff have altered the schedule so that students spend more concentrated time with teachers, and they offer Saturday and summer classes to help students pass their courses and prevent them from dropping out.

These kinds of supports are the hallmark of schools that aim to engage students. Looking across the country, we find numerous examples of successful programs for urban youth. In Philadelphia, the "Say Yes To Education" program begins with seventh graders, monitoring their progress and intervening as problems arise. Staff members make home visits, provide counseling and tutoring, organize internships and summer enrichment programs, and advocate for students.[5] Similarly, teachers at the Urban Academy in New York City create an engaging academic environment for students while simultaneously taking on many roles, including counselor, advisor, mentor, instructor and, even on some occasions, parent.[6]

On balance, schools clearly need to change, but they also need help. Families and individual students need to shoulder more responsibility for attending school and putting forth effort. The resources of neighborhoods and communities also must be brought to bear. The problems of school failure are expansive in scope and need broad-based solutions.

The evidence from this report adds to the discouraging picture of Chicago high schools that emerged in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*. Compared to their elementary school counterparts, high school teachers are more pessimistic about their Local School Council (LSC), their own influence over school policies, their ability to reach out to parents, their working relationships with colleagues, and the degree of focus on student learning. The student voices added in this report provide further testimony of widespread academic and social disengagement in the high schools.

The conclusion seems inescapable: High schools are failing miserably in their mission to educate students for participation in the labor market and entry into higher education. Moreover, it is not simply a matter of a single problem—for example, fixing a dysfunctional LSC, replacing an ineffective principal, involving more parents, or giving more support to students. Rather, in many high schools we are witnessing an across-the-board institutional failure. The majority of Chicago high schools simply do not work for either students or adults. Unless broad-based changes occur, it is unlikely that the benefits of reform, which we are seeing in many elementary schools, will ever materialize for high schools.

PROMOTING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: THE ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

In the summer of 1994, CPS developed a framework of five essential supports for student learning. The essential supports were offered to local schools as an approach to self-assessment, and more recently have been incorporated into the system's guide, *School Improvement Plan: Advancing Academic Achievement*. This framework evolved out of a synthesis of previous research on urban school improvement, specific experiences of Chicago schools during the first five years of reform, and extensive advice from many Chicago school and community leaders. The Consortium participated in these developments and subsequently adopted the framework for its own efforts in assessing the conditions of education in Chicago. *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock* examined three of these supports: school leadership, parental involvement, and professional development and collaboration. This report considered a fourth area: student-centered learning climate. Our next report, to be released later this year, takes up the fifth and most impor-

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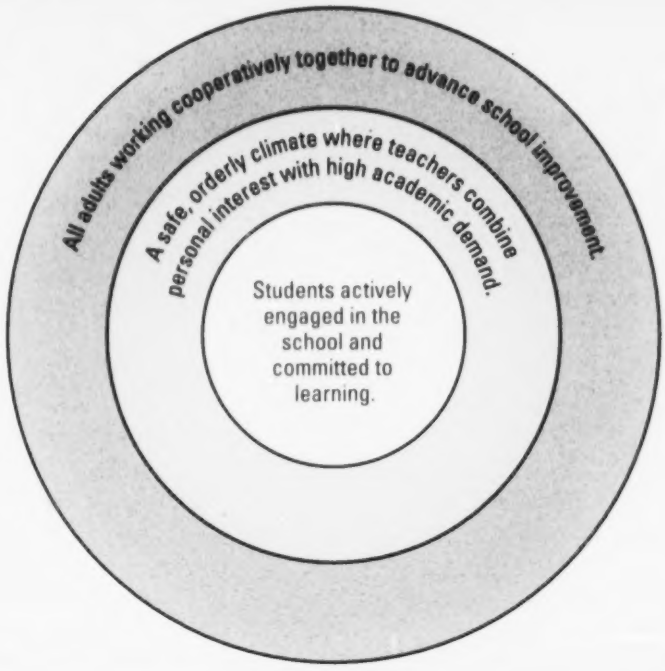
tant of the supports, quality instructional programs.

We now have assembled considerable evidence testifying to the validity of this framework for guiding local efforts. The three supports considered in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock* focused on how adults work together in school communities to advance school improvement and the centrality of social trust among parents, teachers, and the school principal in these developments. The evidence presented in this report directly links such cooperative adult effort around school leadership, parental involvement, and professional community to important consequences for students. Cooperative adult relations pay off in terms of a safe, nurturing environment for students that is strongly oriented toward academic work. Similarly, students in schools where adults are working cooperatively together are also more likely to offer positive reports about their own engagement, be absent less often, spend more time doing homework, participate in extracurricular activities, and experience academic success. In short, it really matters for students when adults are committed to the school and its improvement. Such adult commitment is infectious—literally drawing students more actively into school life.

Further supporting evidence for the utility of the essential supports can be found in our analysis of low-achieving elementary schools. Such schools have material weaknesses in leadership, parent involvement, professional community, and school climate. The survey data presented here statistically link these four essential supports to poor levels of student achievement. They mark out a broad base of improvements that are necessary if substantial gains in student learning are ever to occur in these schools.

School Contexts that Promote Sustained Student Effort


All adults working cooperatively together to advance school improvement.
A safe, orderly climate where teachers combine personal interest with high academic demand.
Students actively engaged in the school and committed to learning.

To be sure, the core of a good school is quality instructional programs. While we will address this topic in our next report, it is obvious that low-achieving schools also need major improvements in this regard. The results presented here, however, document that good instruction rests on a base of human and social resources. Unless efforts are made to strengthen leadership, expand professional engagement in school improvement, and enhance parental support, other attempts to reform low-achieving schools will likely be frustrated.

In conclusion, we have increased confidence in the CPS's use of the framework of essential supports for student learning. While we will continue to evaluate the framework in our subsequent studies, the results assembled to date endorse its role in local school improvement planning. In addition, the framework has important implications as the new administration moves to restructure the central office to assist local school efforts. The framework merits an important place, for example, in the quality review process, and in assembling capacities for school intervention and external support. It also deserves prominence in professional development programs for principals, teachers, and LSC members. More generally, the essential supports should shape initiatives by the Reform Board of Trustees to create incentives and remove barriers to positive development in the Chicago Public Schools.

APPENDIX

Absenteeism and Course Failure in Chicago High Schools

Unit #	Name	Adjusted Absenteeism Days Absent 1993-94	Core Course Failure Rates Fall 1992	Adjusted Core Course Failure Rates Fall 1992
1210	Amundsen High School	26.0	42%	54%
1220	Austin Community Academy High School	28.8	63%	40%
1230	Bogan High School	21.7	29%	38%
1240	Bowen High School	30.0	63%	68%
1250	Calumet High School	42.3	62%	43%
1850	Carver Area High School	24.2	40%	35%
1790	Chicago Agricultural Sciences High School	19.9	54%	75%
1010	Chicago Vocational High School	22.7	41%	49%
1840	Clemente Community Academy	33.4	51%	55%
1880	Collins High School	35.7	52%	53%
1860	Corliss High School	22.4	35%	40%
1270	Crane High School	45.7	59%	36%
1820	Curie Metropolitan High School	26.2	30%	45%
1030	Dunbar Vocational High School	24.9	44%	60%
1280	DuSable High School	49.6	44%	21%
1680	Englewood Preparatory Academy	52.4	61%	37%
1300	Farragut Career Academy High School	33.2	53%	45%
1310	Fenger High School	17.1	52%	56%
1040	Flower Vocational High School	33.2	43%	35%
1330	Foreman High School	35.5	44%	55%
1340	Gage Park High School	25.1	49%	48%
1350	Harlan Community Academy High School	38.6	36%	27%
1360	Harper High School	34.6	27%	14%
1380	Hirsch Metropolitan High School	20.1	49%	53%
1670	Hubbard High School	14.3	21%	36%
1390	Hyde Park Career Academy High School	27.6	19%	22%
1890	Juarez High School	22.8	50%	58%
1870	Julian High School	30.8	55%	62%
1400	Kelly High School	40.3	41%	36%
1410	Kelvyn Park High School	38.3	44%	35%
1420	Kennedy High School	25.4	31%	37%
1710	Kenwood Academy	19.1	36%	58%

Absenteeism and Course Failure in Chicago High Schools

Unit #	Name	Adjusted Absenteeism Days Absent 1993-94	Core Course Failure Rates Fall 1992	Adjusted Core Course Failure Rates Fall 1992
1760	King High School	42.2	47%	24%
1430	Lake View High School	30.6	40%	42%
1440	Lane Technical High School	19.2	27%	58%
1620	Lincoln Park High School	24.0	33%	42%
1450	Lindblom Technical High School	24.8	29%	52%
1460	Manley High School*		40%	23%
1470	Marshall Metropolitan High School	31.7	58%	56%
1480	Mather High School	34.0	32%	39%
1490	Morgan Park High School	17.9	29%	49%
1050	Near North Career Metropolitan High School	25.4	49%	46%
1830	Orr Community Academy High School	36.4	70%	62%
1510	Phillips High School Academy	37.2	34%	17%
1070	Prosser Vocational Prep Center	25.2	24%	37%
1110	Richards Vocational High School	32.4	48%	58%
1320	Robeson High School	38.5	45%	28%
1520	Roosevelt High School	29.9	42%	47%
1530	Schurz High School	31.6	46%	51%
1540	Senn Metropolitan Academy	39.8	45%	52%
1150	Simeon Vocational High School	28.2	49%	65%
1550	South Shore Community High School	30.7	56%	55%
1650	Spalding High School	29.2	20%	18%
1560	Steinmetz Academic Centre	34.4	45%	48%
1570	Sullivan High School	27.4	39%	48%
1580	Taft High School	27.8	21%	28%
1590	Tilden High School	47.3	50%	30%
1610	Von Steuben Metro Science Center	13.9	33%	64%
1630	Washington High School	23.4	42%	57%
1640	Wells Community Academy High School	27.6	42%	48%
1160	Westinghouse Vocational High School*		35%	
1810	Young Magnet High School	14.3	12%	35%

**We received absenteeism data for Manley for 1992–93, which permitted the calculation of the adjusted course failure rate, but data for 1993–94, the year the students were in tenth grade, were missing. For Westinghouse, the 1992–93 absence data were insufficient for analysis, and the 1993–94 data were missing.*

ENDNOTES

Background

[1] In this introduction and wherever we discuss the essential supports for learning, we have drawn heavily from *Children First: Self-Analysis Guide*. This report was formerly titled *Pathways to Achievement: The Three Tiered Process. A Self-Analysis Guide* (Chicago Public Schools, Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning, 1995).

[2] Sebring, Bryk, Easton, Luppescu, Thum, Lopez, and Smith (1995).

[3] In order to ensure that we could accurately describe the views of teachers and students across the city, the survey design included a probability sample of 31 high schools and 80 elementary schools. We focused our initial attention during data collection on obtaining the participation of these schools. Among the high schools, 30, or 96 percent, participated, with an average response rate of 64 percent for students and 63 percent for teachers. Among the elementary school sample, 64 schools, or 80 percent, participated in the surveys. Within these schools, the average response rate was 83 percent for students and 54 percent for teachers. We undertook a series of analyses for possible nonresponse bias among teachers, students, and schools in terms of basic background characteristics. We found few significant differences, leading us to conclude that the probability sample is representative of teachers and students across the Chicago Public Schools.

[4] The basic statistic presented in the report is "percentage of students" who responded to a survey item in a specific way. The percentage that we use for this purpose is based on the probability sample. When we compare different types of schools or ascertain the relative importance of various factors on responses, we make use of all the available data from the participating 266 elementary and 50 high schools. Note that we have included four additional high schools not included in the *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*. These schools participated in the student survey but not the teacher survey, and thus were not part of the previous report.

[5] To receive a report, a school had to obtain a response rate of at least 42 percent among the teachers and 50 percent among the students. Among the schools that received reports, the average response rate was 58 percent for elementary school teachers and 85 percent for students. For high schools, both the teacher and student average response rates were 65 percent.

[6] Ancess (1995), Comer (1980), Haberman (1995), Levine and Lezotte (1990), and Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989). For research on the effectiveness of Catholic schools in educating at-risk students, see Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993).

Section I

[1] *Children First: Self-Analysis Guide* (Chicago Public Schools, Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning, 1995).

[2] Comer (1980) and Levine and Lezotte (1990).

[3] This information is current as of September 29, 1995 (Chicago Public Schools, Office of Accountability, 1995).

[4] Storey, Easton, Sharp, Steans, Ames, and Bassuk (1995).

[5] See Wehlage et al. (1989). These authors argue that, until recently, most research on at-risk students has focused on personal characteristics or problems that interfere with school success. Increasingly, however, researchers are documenting ways that school policies and practices contribute to students' disengagement.

[6] Haberman (1995), p.1.

[7] Graph titles reflect exact wording of the questions in the survey.

[8] Here we have borrowed extensively from *Children First: Self-Analysis Guide* (Chicago Public Schools, Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning, 1995). Also, see McLaughlin, Talbert, Kahne, and Powell (1990) and Wehlage et al. (1989).

[9] Chicago Public Schools, Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning (1995), McLaughlin et al. (1990), and Wehlage et al. (1989).

[10] The comparison group is taken from the *National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988: Base Year* and the *National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988: First Follow-up*. See Ingels, Abraham, Karr, Spencer, and Frankel (1990) and Ingels, Scott, Lindmark, Frankel, and Myers (1992). In order to assure comparability, we restricted the analysis to students attending public schools in urban areas where 50 percent or more of the students are eligible for free lunch. Also, a standardization procedure was used to weight the results according to the proportion of minority students in the Chicago Public Schools. See Anderson, Auquier, Hauck, Oakes, Vandaele, and Weisberg (1980).

[11] In comparing responses of elementary school and high school students, it is important to consider whether there are any underlying differences in these separate populations that may account for differences in their responses. For example, such differences could emerge when students transfer between public and private high schools at ninth grade. There is evidence that a group of academically strong students exit the Chicago Public Schools after eighth grade. About 15 percent of the eighth graders graduating from Chicago elementary schools enroll in private schools or public schools outside of Chicago. On average, these students have higher reading and math scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, the standardized test used in Chicago, than students who remain in the Chicago system.

At the same time, about 8 percent of the ninth-grade class enters the system after having attended private schools or public schools outside of Chicago. These students perform better on the ninth-grade standardized test than the students who attended a Chicago public elementary school. On average, new entrants scored at the 43rd and 38th percentiles on reading and math, respectively, whereas other students performed at the 33rd and 31st percentiles. Yet another factor to consider is that many students drop out in ninth and tenth grade, and generally these students have weaker academic skills.

Hence, there are countervailing trends that make it difficult to assess differences between the elementary and high school populations. On the one hand, a group of better prepared students leaves the school population, and these are replaced by students who also perform better than students who attended a Chicago elementary school. Offsetting this is the exodus of weaker students who drop out of school. Thus, both academically weak and strong students move in and out of the system, and it is difficult to precisely characterize the result. We are confident, however, that the students we surveyed

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are representative of those students who were in school during Spring 1994. Test scores and administrative data used in these analyses were supplied by the Chicago Public Schools.

[12]Chicago Public Schools, Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning (1995).

[13]To minimize the time required for completing the questionnaire, each student answered questions regarding two subjects—either language arts/English and science or math and social studies. Students were instructed to answer questions about a particular combination of subjects according to their birth date, and this yielded random assignment of students to subjects.

[14] For early work on this topic, see Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore (1982). For a more recent and comprehensive treatment, see Bryk, Lee, et al. (1993).

[15]Shouse (1996).

[16]Lee and Bryk (1989).

[17] Here we have borrowed extensively from *Children First: Self-Analysis Guide*. (Chicago Public Schools, Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning, 1995). See also Braddock and McPartland (1993).

[18]Levine and Lezotte (1990), Evertson and Emmer (1982), Gottfredson, Karweit, and Gottfredson (1989), and Duke (1989).

[19] Sebring, Bryk, Easton, et al. (1995)

[20]Bryk, Easton, Kerbow, Rollow, and Sebring (1993).

[21]See Williams (1994). Also George Rukrich, Director of Safety and Security, Chicago Public Schools, provided information on security procedures.

[22] Williams (1994).

[23]Bastian and Taylor (1991).

[24]Illinois State Board of Education (1995).

[25]Bastian and Taylor (1991).

[26]We are indebted to the assistance of Denise Long with the school and community safety analyses. Her thesis research, in progress, examines in much more detail the relative influences of both school organization and community factors.

Data were furnished by Richard Lock, Loyola University, and the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy Program, Chicago Police Department.

[27]With respect to high schools, our initial examination of the relationship between students' ratings of safety and the prevalence of crime immediately surrounding the school are similar. In general, schools in areas where there are higher rates of arrests for robbery, assault, burglary, and auto theft received lower ratings on safety from students. Since high schools draw students from a larger geographic area than elementary schools, more detailed analyses are needed to develop a comprehensive explanation of the ways neighborhood crime rates affect high schools students' sense of safety inside and outside the school.

[28] Ingels et al. (1990) and Ingels et al. (1992).

[29]Crime data were obtained for 11 categories of crime: murder and voluntary manslaughter; robbery and attempted robbery; other assaults including rape; burglary from home or business; auto theft; thefts, including thefts from an automobile; drugs; vice and prostitution; arson, vandalism, and trespass; weapons; and other crimes. These data were then factor analyzed. The factor loadings for each category were used as weights to calculate a weighted mean of the crime data in the 11 categories. The crime composite is the weighted mean standardized to a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.0.

[30]We correlated the inside and outside school safety questions separately with the neighborhood crime statistics. Across the board, these relationships were slightly higher for outside of school safety. For example, the correlations with the assault rate were –.60 (outside safety) versus –.52 (inside safety). For the weapons rate, the comparable correlations were –.55 and –.47. For drug arrests, the correlations were –.51 and –.42 respectively.

[31] This analysis was based on a Hierarchical Linear Model (HLM) which allows us to examine the effects of school characteristics while holding constant individual student characteristics.

Cooperative adult effort toward school improvement is a composite indicator which we reported in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*. Specifically it includes the following scales developed for the teacher survey: LSC contribution, principal leadership, teacher influence, SIP implementation, parents' involvement with the school, teachers' outreach to parents, reflective dialogue, deprivatization, peer collaboration, shared norms, focus on student learning, orientation to innovation, collective responsibility, and teachers' commitment to the school. To create the composite indicator, the school means for the 14 measures were standardized and an overall mean was calculated.

[32] To obtain estimates of the education, employment, and poverty levels and stability of Chicago neighborhoods, we used U.S. census data from 1990. This required coding students' addresses according to the census block in which they reside. We then used the information from the census regarding average education, employment, income levels, etc. for households in the census block. This was also done for schools, so that we could characterize the social and economic conditions of the neighborhood surrounding schools. All individual addresses were kept confidential and used only as a means to link to the census data; they have been stripped from the data files.

[33]Students who receive a rating of A, B, or C on a test of English proficiency are eligible for bilingual education, and for this analysis we have assumed that they are in a bilingual education class. The A classification means the least knowledge of English and a C means the most knowledge. (Students who are classified as G are eligible for regular classes.)

[34] We wanted to determine if the differences in responses among students in bilingual and regular education classes were independent of being Hispanic, and it turned out that they were.

[35]Low income refers to being eligible for free and reduced-cost lunch. The threshold for low income is higher than the poverty level, which was referred to at the beginning of this section.

[36]The composite indicator of student-centered learning climate includes the following scales: personalism, press toward academic achievement, peer support for academic work, classroom behavior, and safety. To create the composite indicator, the school means for the five scales were standardized, and an overall mean was calculated.

[37]Bryk, Easton, et al. (1993) and Sebring, Bryk, Easton, et al. (1995).

[38]For descriptive purposes, we often refer to the differences observed in the top

Table A. Correlation Between School Characteristics and School Absence Rate
Controlling for Student Characteristics

Survey Measure	Correlation
School commitment (teacher survey)	-.35**
Trust among teachers (teacher survey)	-.29**
Parents' involvement with students (student survey)	-.37***
Press toward academic achievement (student survey)	-.40***
Peer support for academic work (student survey)	-.30**
Classroom behavior (student survey)	-.39***
Safety (student survey)	-.42***

** p<.05 *** p<.01

and bottom 30 schools. The identification of the "overall pattern" was based on a Hierarchical Linear Model (HLM) that used all 202 schools. The model allows us to examine the effects of school characteristics, while holding constant individual student characteristics. To provide a more concrete illustration of the HLM results, we resorted to top/bottom 30 comparisons.

[10]See endnote 31 for a description of cooperative adult effort toward school improvement.

[11]Sebring, Bryk, Easton, et al. (1995).

Section II

[1]Finn (1993).

[2]Goodlad (1984), Finn (1993), Sedlack, Wheeler, Pullin, and Cusick (1986), Oakes (1985), and Cusick (1983).

[3]Eighth- and tenth-grade students answered this series of questions for two subjects—either language arts/English and science or social studies and math. Since the sixth-grade questionnaire was shorter, sixth graders were asked these questions regarding school in general.

[4]The data for sixth and eighth graders are based on survey self-reports, which we believe underestimate their true absenteeism. We did find a bias for tenth graders where we could directly compare student survey responses to administrative records. Several possible explanations may account for the under-reporting: 1) the surveys were administered in May, a month prior to the end of the year, which is typically a period of high absenteeism; 2) according to administrative procedures, students are marked absent for one-half day if they miss one class for the day. The survey responses may be tapping non-attendance for the whole day; and 3) retrospective reports can be unreliable. We do know from tenth-grade data, however, that the survey reports tend to correlate highly with the administrative data. That is, students who are frequently absent according to administrative records tend to report frequent absenteeism on the surveys.

[5]Tenth graders also answered a survey question about absenteeism. However, knowing that students who were not in class the day the questionnaires were completed were more likely to be absent frequently, we concluded that the official transcript was a more reliable source of information. The Chicago Public Schools provided the data. For elementary schools, it was not possible to use school system information because the records are kept at each school, and only aggregate numbers are sent to the central office.

[6]Bryk and Thum (1989).

[7]Hess, Wells, Prindle, Liffman, and Kaplan (1986). See also Hess, Lyons, Corsino, and Wells (1989).

[8]By using Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM), we can examine how the absenteeism rate may vary across schools *once we have controlled for the fact that schools serve different student populations*. HLM allows us to address the question: How would absenteeism vary if each school had a student body that was fairly typical for the city as a whole? Adjustments were made for the following student characteristics: race, gender, number of elementary school changes, eighth-grade test score, age, and bilingual status. Specialized schools, such as the Cook County Jail school and the school for pregnant teens (TESLA), were excluded from these analyses.

[9]Since these data aggregated to the school level are made available to the public, we have identified schools by name. This runs counter to the normal Consortium policy of assuring confidentiality to schools that complete our surveys. Consistent with this policy, all survey data reported in this section remain anonymous.

[10]We ran a series of correlations and scatter plots to identify these factors. The correlations are shown in Table A.

[11]Hess et al. (1986).

[12]Wehlage et al. (1989).

[13]To estimate the impact of school characteristics on various aspects of student engagement, we carried out HLM analyses. Separate analyses were run for elementary and high school students. These analyses allow us to test whether certain school characteristics are associated with higher levels of engagement, while holding individual student characteristics constant. In other words, these analyses permit us to answer this question: Assuming that all schools served an average Chicago student population, what impact would school size, average achievement level of the school, and the average rating of the school climate have on measures of student engagement? Statistical controls were introduced for income level, gender, race/ethnicity, bilingual status, and riding a bus to school.

Section III

[1]The data used in this section on course failures come from the Chicago Public Schools' transcript files. Since the basic statistical information, aggregated to the school level, is public data, we specifically identify schools by name in this section. This runs counter to normal Consortium policy of assuring confidentiality to schools that complete our surveys. Consistent with this policy, the identity of teachers, students, and schools who provided survey data are not revealed in this report.

[2]Quotes from Anna's mother are trans-

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lated from an interview conducted in Spanish.

[7]To examine students' risk of course failure, we estimated the percent chance a student would fail at least one core academic course or drop out during the first semester of high school. These predictions were made using logistic regression models where students' race, gender, eighth-grade achievement, number of elementary school changes, age, and number of first semester school absences were considered. Separate models were run for each student characteristic yielding marginal chances for different student groups. A second set of predicted chances were generated from a combined model which simultaneously included all student characteristics. These percent chances illustrate what the likelihood of course failure for different types of students would be if students were the same on all of the other characteristics that were considered. When controlling for other student characteristics, differences by race, number of school changes, and age shrunk considerably. In comparison, differences by gender, eighth-grade achievement, and school absences changed very little.

[8]The data presented in three of the graphs that follow (Chance of Failing a Core Course by Student's Race/Ethnicity, Chance of Failing by Number of Days Absent, and Chance of Failing by Student's Gender) show the percent chance that students in each group will fail at least one core course in the first semester of ninth grade. These percents will differ because different groups of students face different risks and because different groups of students vary with respect to low achievement or low attendance, that place them at risk. Using multivariate analysis, we can sort out the relative effect of these attributes. African-American, Hispanic, and white students enter high school with different levels of achievement and have different attendance patterns in the first semester. In addition, some racial/ethnic groups have high proportions of students who are older than average for grade. After we adjust for all these factors, we find that there are little remaining differences in the predicted chance of failing a core course. When accounting for each group's gender composition, eighth grade test scores, first semester attendance, and age distribution, the predicted chance of failing a core course is 43 percent for African-American students, 48 percent for Hispanic students, and 40 percent for white, non-Hispanic students.

Table B. Correlation between School Characteristics Thought to be Supportive of Recovery and Second Semester Recovery Rates

Survey measure	Recovery from one F	Recover from half to ¾ Fs	Recovery from ¾ or more Fs
Principal leadership	.26*	.14	.13
Deprivatization of teaching practice	.38***	.23	.25*
Teachers' access to new ideas	.27*	.20	.29*
Teachers' socialization of new colleagues	.29**	.19	.09
Personalism	.15	.11	.13

* p<.1 ** p<.05 ***p<.01

[9]Roderick (1994).

[10]Specialized schools, such as the Cook County Jail school and the school for pregnant teens (TESLA), were excluded from these analyses.

[11]There is some debate about the appropriateness of controlling for first semester attendance in an analysis that attempts to understand how ninth grade schools differentially affect failure rates. From one point of view, problems of absenteeism are subject to school redress and, therefore, should be considered "part of the effect" for which schools are held accountable. However, a contrasting view is offered by the ninth-grade teachers interviewed for the Student Life in High Schools Project (SLP). Many of these teachers felt that student attendance in the first few semesters of high school was out of their control. A common concern they expressed was, "How can I be expected to influence kids if they don't show up to school?" In the interests of a conservative school effects analysis, we included first semester absenteeism as a control. The statistical decision to be cautious when declaring school effects should not be viewed as endorsing the position that schools cannot affect attendance in the early semesters of high school. Quite the contrary, there is ample research evidence supporting the opposite position.

[12]By using Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM), we can get a better picture of how the chances of a student failing at least one core course varies across schools *once we have controlled for the fact that schools serve different populations.* To be more specific, HLM allows us to address the question: How would the probability of failing at least one core course vary across schools if each school had a student body that was like that of the city as a whole? Adjustments were made for the following student characteristics: race, gender, number of elementary school changes, eighth-grade achievement, age, number of school absences, and bilingual status.

The proportion failing was computed by dividing the number of students failing one course in the first semester by the total number of cohort members in the school who took a core course that semester.

[13]Eccles, Lord, and Midgley (1991) obtained similar results, i.e., that teachers in the elementary schools they studied felt more efficacious toward their students than teachers in secondary schools.

[14]We re-ran a series of exploratory analyses (correlations and scatter plots) to identify these factors. The correlations are presented in Table B.

[15]After consulting with several individuals and organizations that provide assistance to schools, we identified a subset of six schools as candidates for study. Manley was eventually chosen because of its disadvantaged population.

[16]Joseph Kahne, Assistant Professor of Policy Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago, visited Manley and contributed

to this case study.

[10]The cumulative dropout rate was calculated by dividing the number of dropouts in this and previous semesters by the number of enrolled students plus the number of dropouts from previous semesters.

[11]Sebring, Bryk, Easton, et al. (1995).

[12]Cameron and Heckman (1991).

Section IV

[1]Given that two-thirds of the city's high schools are considered low-achieving schools, we do not have sufficient data on a comparison group of other secondary schools in Chicago to undertake this analysis. In particular, once the selective magnet high schools are removed from the comparison group, only a handful of schools—too few for stable statistical comparisons—remain. Basically, the general results on high schools presented in this report and in the earlier companion volume (*Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*,1995) describe the low-achieving high schools.

[2]In establishing this list based solely on overall student status attainment, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) failed to recognize the highly varied conditions affecting Chicago schools. Basically, a school can be held accountable only for the learning that occurs while students are under instruction in that school. This implies a need for a "value-added" indicator of school performance that explicitly takes into account student mobility and other relevant factors that may be changing over time. For a further discussion of these issues see Meyer (1996) and Bryk, Deabster, Easton, Luppescu, and Thum (1994).

Since the low-achieving schools are currently subject to a range of district and state interventions, we nonetheless chose to proceed with this analysis. If special activities are to occur in these schools, they should be informed by the best available information.

[3]Chicago Public Schools, Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning (1995).

[4]Chicago Public Schools, SIP Redesign Team (1996).

[5]We undertook an analysis to check for a possible non-response bias among the low-achieving schools. Specifically, we compared a wide range of student composition and school descriptive variables for the 61 elementary schools with survey data and the 43 low-achieving schools for which we do not have survey data. In general, these two groups appear very comparable. No significant differences were found in terms of pre-reform achievement level, percent low-income enrollment, school mobility, or racial/ethnic composition. While some small differences were found on other variables, no consistent pattern emerged. In some cases, the surveyed group appeared more advantaged; in others, the non-responding group was advantaged.

[6]We had not developed the principal supervision indicator at the time the individual school reports were released (January 1995). For this reason, we did not include it in the basic profiles used in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*, although we did use it in our HLM analyses. Because low-achieving schools are considerably lower on this indicator, we have added it here. The indicator consists of teachers' responses to two items, aggregated to the school level: principals regularly visit classrooms and principals closely monitor instruction.

[7]Statistical analyses were undertaken to test whether differences in overall survey measures were related to the differences in student and community characteristics between these two groups of schools. We examined the potential influence of percentage of low-income students, the concentration of poverty in the community, residential mobility, and student mobility, and found they had little or no impact on the analysis. The differences between low-achieving schools and other schools described in this section persist beyond compositional differences in the student populations.

[8]The average low-achieving school is in the bottom quartile of the CPS on this school indicator. The description offered here is how teachers in these bottom quartile schools responded to this set of survey items (Sebring, Bryk, Luppescu, Thum, 1995, p. 25).

[9]For further discussion of these results see *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock* (Sebring, Bryk, Easton, et al., 1995, p. 23).

[10]The typical teacher in a low-achieving school reported *limited involvement* by parents. (Sebring, Bryk, Easton, et al., 1995, p. 24.)

[11]This measure was not used in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock* because it was available for elementary schools only. It was, however, included in the individual reports to elementary schools. *Charting Reform in Prairie School: Results of Student and Teacher Surveys* (Sebring, Bryk, Luppescu, et al., 1995, p. 36).

[12]We note that there is less variability among Chicago schools on the first three indicators of professional community than for the last two components (see Table C). Most of the differences in how individuals respond to these items is among teachers within the same faculty. This finding is consistent with a growing body of school organizational research that describes an internally frag-

Table C. Variation in Professional Community Measures

Proportion of variance:	Reflective dialogue	Deprivatization of practice	Shared norms	Focus on student learning	Collegiality
Within schools	.88	.85	.90	.82	.73
Between schools	.12	.15	.10	.18	.27

mented teacher practice, where small subgroups of teachers may work productively together but do not necessarily form an overall cohesive school workplace.

As we continue to analyze these data, the shared norms indicator appears increasingly anomalous, raising doubts about its validity as an indicator of professional community. Since we did report it in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock*, we have also included it here. However, no interpretation is offered for these results. See seminal work of McLaughlin et al. (1990) on internal school fragmentation.

[11]Average low-achieving schools scored as *minimal* on collegiality. See *Charting Reform in Prairie School: Results of Student and Teacher Surveys* (Sebring, Bryk, Luppescu, et al., 1995, p. 54). The item description presented here is the typical pattern in this category.

[12]We are reporting here on teachers classified as having either *moderate* or *no focus* on student learning in *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock* (Sebring, Bryk, Easton, et al., 1995, p. 40).

[13]The average low-achieving school scored as *limited responsibility* on this indicator. See *Charting Reform in Prairie School: Results of Student and Teacher Surveys* (Sebring, Bryk, Luppescu, et al., 1995, p. 54). The item description presented here is the typical pattern in this category.

[14]Sebring, Bryk, Easton, et al. (1995) p. 41.

[15]Teachers in low-achieving schools are almost twice as likely to characterize their school as *very incoherent*. Some 18 percent of teachers in low-achieving elementary schools fall into this category, compared to 10 percent in other CPS schools. For a further description of the program coherence scale, see *Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock* (Sebring, Bryk, Easton, et al., 1995, p. 50).

Interpretive Summary

[1]Bryk et al. (1993).

[2]Williams (1994).

[3]Williams (1994).

[4]Brookover (1981) and Edmonds (1979).

[5]Newberg and Sims (1996).

[6]Ancess (1995).

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Charting Reform in Chicago: The Students Speak

A Report Sponsored by the Consortium on Chicago School Research

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